

## OF FAITH.

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*He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved ; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*—MARK XVI. 16.

THESE words require as serious attention as any that ever were spoken to the sons of men ; for they are the words of Christ, the words of one from the dead.

The last words of Christ, of our departing Saviour. The last instructions of a departing friend, whom never like to see more in the world, they make deep impression.

Why here is the last words of Christ upon earth, the last will of Christ, our husband, our friend, our elder brother. When he had said this, he said no more that the evangelist relates ; for, ver. 19, ‘after he had spoken these words, he was received up into heaven.’

They are of greatest consequence, the sum of the gospel, the whole epitomised in two sentences ; the whole covenant of grace. As much in this verse virtually, as in the whole gospel. Life and death, and the conditions of both ; the terms of eternal happiness or misery. If a malefactor at the bar should see the judge going about to declare to him upon what he might expect life or death, how diligently would he attend ! All sinners are malefactors. The Judge of heaven and earth declares here, upon what terms we may live, though we be cast, found guilty, and condemned. It is not a matter of credit or estate, but a matter of life and death, of the life of our souls. It is no less than eternal life or eternal death, that these words concern. And therefore,

The condition of life is double : 1, principal, faith ; 2, accessory, baptism. Accessory, I call it, because it is not absolutely necessary to life, as faith is. *Non privatio, sed contemptus damnat.* And therefore it is left out in the latter part. It is not, he that is [not] baptized shall be damned, but he that believes not. Faith is so necessary, as he that believes not, though he be baptized, shall be damned.

*Doct.* Salvation or damnation depend upon faith and unbelief. No salvation but by faith. Nothing but damnation by unbelief.

Faith is the principal saving grace, and unbelief the chief damning sin. No sin can damn without this, and this will damn without any other sin : John iii. 18, ‘is condemned.’ The law, which threatens death for every sin, has already passed sentence of condemnation upon all, because all are sinners. This sentence is so peremptory as it admits but of one exception,

which the gospel brings in. All are condemned, and shall be executed, except they believe. So that where there is not faith, the sentence of condemnation is in full force. An unbeliever so continuing is as sure to be damned, as if in hell already ; as sure to be cast into outer darkness, as if he were tormented in everlasting burnings ; as sure to bear the eternal, insupportable wrath of God, as if he had now fellowship with the devil and his angels.

We say of a man that has the symptoms of death, he is a dead man. Unbelief is the symptom of eternal death. There is nothing but death to be expected where this continues ; no hopes of eternal life if he persevere in unbelief. He is dead while he lives ; in hell while he is on earth.

The great physician of souls gives him over. He that healed all manner of diseases cannot cure him, cannot prevent his eternal death who continues in unbelief. When the plague-sore appears in a person, we conclude him dead, shut him up, debar him of society with living men, write *Lord have mercy* upon his door. Unbelief is the sore of an eternal plague, of that plague which is incurable. While unbelief continues, he is shut up amongst the dead, but in this more miserable, as there is no hopes of life, so no hopes of mercy ; he must die without mercy. There is neither life nor mercy for an unbeliever. When we see a condemned malefactor upon the scaffold, with his neck upon the block, and none to plead for his pardon, nor hopes of prevailing if there were any to plead, we may conclude he is a dead man.

In such a condition is an unbeliever, he is condemned already, the instruments of death are ready. There is none in heaven or earth will plead for his pardon ; nor would the Lord pardon him, so continuing, if all in heaven and earth should become intercessors. No hopes for him, except he believe, he must die the death, he is condemned already, the mouth of the Lord has spoken it.

Now if faith be so necessary, and unbelief so dangerous, it concerns us to know what it is to believe.

It comprises, 1, knowledge ; 2, assent ; 3, dependence, or relying on the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. *Knowledge.* Faith is expressed by knowledge, Isa. liii. 11. If knowledge be not faith, yet there can be no faith without knowledge.

That blind faith of the papists is good for nothing but to lead them into the ditch. That ignorance is the mother of devotion, is one of the principles of the father of lies. Sure it is the nurse of unbelief. It is Satan's muffler, which he makes use of to lead sinners blindfold into hell ; it brings them there before they know where they are. Ignorant persons are like the Syrians, struck with blindness, 2 Kings vi. 20. They thought they were going on a hopeful design, but when their eyes were opened, they found themselves in the midst of Samaria, in the midst of their enemies. The first step to conversion is to open the eyes, to scatter darkness, Acts xxvi. 18. He begins the new creation as he did the creation of the world : 'Let there be light,' Gen. i. The first thing he produces is light. There is a dawning of the day before the day-star arise ; some light goes before the sun rising. Such a dawning of knowledge there is before the Sun of righteousness arise, before Christ dwell in the heart by faith ; some light from the law discovering sin and misery ; some light from the gospel discovering Christ's excellency and all-sufficiency. There is a competent knowledge of the mysteries of the gospel, a knowledge more distinct, more convincing, more affecting, than that which he had in the state of unbelief.

2. *Assent.* As to the principles of the doctrine of Christ, so especially to these two truths: 1, that he has a necessity of a Saviour; 2, that Christ is the only all-sufficient Saviour.

(1.) There is an absolute necessity of a Saviour, which the Scripture declares upon three grounds: 1, the sinfulness of a natural man; 2, his misery; 3, his inability to free himself from it.

There must be a full and effectual assent to, and belief of, what the Lord declares concerning his sinful, miserable, impotent state.

3. *Recumbence*, relying upon Christ. To rely upon Christ alone for salvation is saving faith.

It is not to believe him, but to believe *on* him; which the New Testament expresses by a peculiar phrase, not used by heathen authors: πιστεύειν εἰς τὸν Χριστόν, Acts xix. 4; εἰς ἑμὲ, Mat. ix. 42; ἐπὶ τὸν, or, ἐπὶ τῷ, Acts xvi. 31, ἐπὶ τὸν Κύριον; Rom. ix. 33, πιστεύων ἐπ' αὐτῷ; Mark i. 15, ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ; Rom. iii. 25, ἐν τῷ αἵματι; Gal. iii. 24, εἰς Χριστόν; Eph. i. 15; εἰς τὸ ὄνομα, John i. 12, &c.

It is not to give credit to him, but to rely on him; it is to trust in him. To trust in him is more than to believe him, to assent to his word as true. It is, as Lombard explains it, lib. 3, dist. 23, *credendo in eum ire, credendo ei adherere*, to adhere, depend, rely on him; not *credere*, but *fidere, fiduciam ponere*.

This is the essence, the formality of saving faith. There cannot be justifying faith without knowledge and assent, but there may be knowledge and assent without it; these are as the body to faith, this relying is the soul; without this, knowledge and assent are but a carcase. The devils and hypocrites may have more knowledge, and they may have as firm an assent, but this act is above their reach, and they never attain it.

Now because there is some difference amongst divines about the nature and essence of faith, some placing it in assent, some in assurance, &c.;

And because there are mistakes amongst ordinary Christians, many concluding they rely on Christ when indeed they do not;

And because mistakes are here dangerous, it being a matter of life and death eternal, of salvation or damnation,—faith being the first stone on which the structure of salvation is raised, and an error in the foundation threatens ruin to the whole;

It behoves to be diligent in inquiring what this faith is, what the nature of this dependence and relying on Christ.

Now, the best way to find this out will be to discuss those words and phrases whereby the Holy Ghost in Scripture expresses faith. From these we may get light sufficient to discover the nature of this act; and these are various.

1. To believe is to come to Christ, so it is expressed in the New Testament; to betake ourselves to him, so in the Old Testament. And both express this dependence, this relying on Christ; for to betake ourselves wholly unto one is to rely on him. To say, I betake myself to you alone, is as much as I rely only on you.

So **קָרַב**, used in the Old Testament for trust, relying, &c., signifies also to approach, to draw near, Ezra xxiv. 2,\* answerably the apostle, Heb.

\* This sentence is evidently incorrect. There are not twenty-four chapters in the Book of Ezra, and **קָרַב** does not mean either to *trust* or to *approach*, but to *mix*. Perhaps it ought to be, 'So **קָרַב**, used in the Old Testament for trust, reliance, &c., signifies also to draw near, *Job* xxiv. 2.' In the next paragraph, **קָרַב** is three

1. 22, Προσερχώμεθα ἰν πληροφορία πίστεως, let us come with full sail, with all haste, as a ship when it makes all its sail; or if we take it as it is rendered, full assurance of faith, such a confidence as faith is in its full growth and strength; yet there is also a beginning of our confidence, Heb. iii. 14. The first intent motion of the soul to Christ is ἀγχή τῆς ὑποστάσεως, 'faith in its infancy. But to come to the words whereby it is ordinarily expressed under this notion:

To believe is to come to Christ, John vi. 35; here, to come is to believe. The same may be evidently collected from ver. 64 and 65. We see this in the prodigal; he is an emblem of a sinner both in his fall and in recovery by faith: Luke xv., 'He went into a far country,' ver. 13. A sinner in unbelief is a stranger to Christ, lives at a great distance from him, without God in the world. His employment base, ver. 15; baser is the employment of a sinner; he is sin's drudge, he is Satan's slave, serves them in a cruel bondage; though he gratify Satan, and provide for his lusts, yet he starves his soul, ver. 16. The lusts of the flesh, the vanities of the world, are the husks that a sinner feeds on; no wonder if his soul pine and languish at the gates of death. All this while he is in a swoon, sin has stupified him, he has lost his senses. Though he be ready to perish, he apprehends it not; he comes not to himself till he think of coming to Christ, ver. 17. Till the Lord awaken the stupified conscience by the ministry of the law, till he prick the heart, drop wrath into the soul, make some impressions of terror on it, he remains senseless as to the condition of his soul; but then he comes to himself, he comes to his senses, feels the burden of sin, sees hell ready to swallow him, apprehends himself ready to perish. And then, not till then, he resolves, ver. 18, 'I will arise,' &c., and he pursues his resolution, ver. 20, he came; i. e., he believed. The word in the Old Testament is חסה; Ps. lxxiv. 10, 'The righteous shall be glad in the Lord, and' ב' חסה 'shall trust in him.' It signifies to fly, to betake one's self to a place of safety; as the chickens, in danger to be seized on, fly under the wings of the hen: Ruth ii. 12, 'Under whose wings thou art come to trust,' לחסות. The helpless bird pursued by the kite, in danger to be devoured, runs under the wing of the dam. Thus it is with a sinner at the first working of faith, he apprehends himself pursued by wrath and judgment; he knows if they seize on him he must perish without remedy. Oh the sad condition of such a soul! Oh, but he sees Christ spreading his wings ready to secure perishing sinners; he hears him inviting in the gospel to come under his shadow. Oh, how sweet is that voice to him (however, while senseless he neglected)! He hears, obeys, and runs to Christ for shelter, and so he is safe: Ps. xxxvi. 7, 'How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.'

To believe in Christ is to fly to him as to a stronghold, a refuge, a sanctuary, Nahum i. 7. The Lord is good, a stronghold, he knoweth them חס'י, that trust in him. And hence it is that from this root come some words, חסות and מחסה, which signifies a refuge, a place of security, a hiding place: Ps. xci. 2, 'I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and fortress: my God; in him will I trust;' Isa. xxx. 3, 'They trust in the shadow of Egypt;' Ps. xiv. 6, 'The Lord is his refuge.'

It is with the sensible sinner as it was with the man-slayer under the law; if the avenger of blood overtook him before he recovered the city of times printed for חסה; but the correction is put beyond doubt by the references. Indeed, every Hebrew word in this sermon is misprinted.—Ed.

refuge, he was to kill him. The awakened sinner perceives that he is pursued by revenging justice, it follows him as Asahel did Joab, pursues him close, he turns not to the right hand nor to the left, and if he overtake him, the sinner dies without mercy, he dies eternally. Now there is no city of refuge for the sinner but Christ only; he is discovered, he is set open in the gospel, and he that gets into him is safe, revenging justice cannot touch him. And therefore the poor sinner makes haste, he flies as for his life, the life of his soul, he knows he is but a dead man if justice reach him; he casts off sin, which clogs him in his flight, he looks not aside to the world, he puts forth the whole strength of his soul, and makes out to Christ with all his might, and never rests till he get into him. This vigorous motion of the soul towards Christ is faith. Those dull and sluggish souls, who have no motion to Christ but some wishes, some faint inclinations, know not what faith is. So eager was the apostle in his tendency to Christ, as he cast off all things as dung, how precious soever they had been to him before; he threw away all as loss and dung that might hinder him in his way to Christ, Phil. iii. Be found in him as in the city of refuge. Joab knew that he was obnoxious to justice; he heard Adonijah was put to death for a crime that he was guilty of, he expected nothing but death except some extraordinary course were taken to prevent it. Now what course he takes you may see; 1 Kings ii. 28, 'he caught hold on the horns of the altar.' Answerably, a sensible sinner, he apprehends his guilt, his provocation, he has received the sentence of death within himself, he knows there are thousands in hell for those very sins whereof he is guilty, and he concludes his soul will be in hell ere long, it may be the next hour, if he take not some course to secure himself from justice. Now there is no sanctuary for a guilty soul but Christ only; therefore he flies to the tabernacle of the Lord, and so takes hold on the horns of the altar; he flies to Christ, lays hold on him, resolves if he die he will die there. There he is safer than Joab in his sanctuary; for Christ is that strong tower to which the righteous fly and are safe, Prov. xviii. 10. This making out to Christ with all the strength of the soul for refuge is faith. To believe is to come, fly, Heb. vi. 18.

2. To believe in Christ is to lean upon him, to stay and rest on him. The word is **שע**, and it is used when Saul is said to lean upon his spear, 2 Sam. i. 6. Hence comes **שע**, which signifies a stay, a staff whereon we lean to support ourselves. So the Lord is called: Ps. xviii. 18, 'The Lord was my stay.' Thus, to lean upon Christ is to trust in him, when we stay on him as the only staff and support of our souls. So the word is rendered, Isa. x. 20, when we rest on him. So we have it, 2 Chron. xiv. 11, 'Help us, O Lord our God, for we rest,' &c. More especially, Prov. iii. 5, 'Trust in the Lord,' &c.; Isa. l. 10, 'Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay himself,' &c.; where to trust and to stay, **בטח** and **שע** are all one, one is explained by the other.

Now this leaning does most significantly express this act of faith we call relying; and so the word is rendered 2 Chron. xiii. 18, 2 Chron. xvi. 7, 8.

There is another word of the same signification, by which the Holy Ghost expresses faith in the Old Testament, and that is **סמך**, which signifies to lean or stay upon: Isa. xlvi. 2, 'Stay themselves upon the God of Israel,' **נסמכו**, which is explained to be trusting, Isa. xxvi. 3; **סמך**, whose mind is stayed, because he trusteth **בסמך**. So 2 Kings xviii. 21, 'Thou trustest upon the staff of this bruised reed, on which if a man lean' (**יסמך**), &c.

Now these words give us great light to discern what this act of saving faith is. A sinner, before the Lord stir him up to believe, is in a dead sleep; and there he dreams of heaven, and who surer of it than he? But when the Lord awakens him, he finds that he has been all this while sleeping on the battlements of hell; all his former hopes and persuasions prove but fancies and delusions. He thought himself safe enough, but he finds that he stands upon the very brink of the bottomless pit; has no sure footing neither; he stands in a slippery place; and the very weight of his sins is enough to carry him down headlong into that place of torment. Sin is a fall, *παράπτωμα*; and it is a wonder that every sin is not a fall into hell. One sin was heavy enough to cast many hundreds of angels from the height of glory into the lower hell. And alas, then, says the sinner, what shall become of me, who have the weight of so many thousand sins upon my soul! How shall I stand under so many, when they were sunk by the weight of one! Oh what sad thoughts will assail the soul of a sinner, when he is fully apprehensive of his danger! Ay, but this is not all; he not only stands on the ridge of destruction, in such a tottering condition, but Satan is pushing at him, and incensed justice is ready to tumble him down. And what if a tempest of wrath should arise, if the Lord, in just indignation, should come upon him as a whirlwind? what would then become of him? Had he not need to look out for some support, for something to stay his soul on, which otherwise is every moment in danger to tumble into hell? He has nothing at present that keeps him standing but the patience of God. Oh but this is abused, provoked; this is no sure support, he is not sure of it an hour; it may withdraw the next moment, and then where is he? What then can stay the soul from falling into everlasting burnings? Why, none but Christ. Unless he stay his soul upon him, he falls, he sinks, he perishes without remedy. This he hears and believes, and makes out to Christ for support. Not being able to stand under the weight of sin, under the pressures of wrath and justice, he leans upon Christ. The burdened sinking soul rests upon Christ, and so is established, Ps. cxii. 7, 8.

8. To believe in Christ is to adhere to him, to cleave to him, cling about him. The two words last instanced in, rendered to trust, do also signify a close adhering: Numb. xxi. 15, 'Lieth upon the border of Moab,' runs close to it. We may get some sparks from this word to light us in this search. A man that has suffered shipwreck is left to the mercy of the waves; has nothing in his reach to secure him but some planks or mast. How will he cling to it! how fast will he clasp! He will hold it as if it were his life, 2 Kings xviii. 5, Deut. iv. 4. He knows he is a dead man if he leave it; and therefore if any wave drive him off, he makes to it again with all his might, and clasps it faster. He knows there is no way but sink and perish if he part with it.

A sinner, when the Lord begins to work faith in him, apprehends himself in a gulf of wrath; all the billows and waves go over him, and the depths are ready to swallow him up. Now in this case he sees no other security but Christ; he is the only *tabula post naufragium*, the only plank that is left (after our miserable wreck in Adam) to bring a sinner to shore; and therefore he cleaves to him; his soul clasps about him; he holds him as he would hold his soul ready to leave him, if it could come into his embraces. He knows, if he part, he sinks for ever; and therefore if any apprehension of wrath, of sin, of unworthiness, would drive him off, he clings closer to him, or he sinks eternally.

4. To believe in Christ is to roll, to cast ourselves upon him. The word is גָּלַל, rendered by trust: Ps. xxii. 8, 'He trusted in the Lord,' גָּלַל אֶל יְהוָה, he rolled himself upon the Lord; so Ps. xxxvii. 5, 'Commit thy way,' גָּלַל עַל יְהוָה, roll thy way upon the Lord; and what that is, the next words shew, בָּטַח, it is to trust in him; so Prov. xvi. 3, 'Commit thy works unto the Lord,' גָּלַל, the same word, roll thy works upon, &c. The expression is explained by another word, שָׁלַךְ: Ps. lv. 23, 'Cast thy burden upon the Lord,' &c., a metaphor taken from one ready to fall down under a heavy burden; he casts it upon one more able to bear it.

Now sin is a heavy, a most grievous burden; the Lord himself complains of the weight of it, Amos ii. 13. The weight of sin, though Christ had none of his own, made him sweat, and sweat blood; made his soul heavy. It is burdened with the wrath and heavy indignation of God; it is clogged with the curses and threatenings of the law, so called frequently. No wonder if one sin be as a millstone about the neck of the soul, able to sink it into the bottom of hell.

But though it be so burdensome, yet the sinner, till conversion, finds no weight in it. No wonder, since he is dead in trespasses. Cast rocks and mountains upon a dead man, he feels them not.

Ay, but when the Lord begins to work faith, and brings the sinner to himself, then he feels it burdensome indeed; he wonders at his former stupidity, he groans under the weight, he apprehends himself even sinking under the burden; and if he be not eased of this burden, he feels it will press him into hell. He lies grovelling under the weight, and cries, Help, help, or else I sink, I perish; and who is there that can help the soul in this sad condition?

If he should call to the angels, they know it is too heavy, they dare not come near it; they can remember since the weight of one sin sunk some thousands of their companions into the bottomless pit.

If he should call to the saints, they have enough of their own burden, Ps. xxxviii. 4.

If he should call to the inferior creatures, they need help as well as he. It is the weight of sin that makes the whole creation groan and travail in pain, Rom. viii. 22. Let the oppressed sinner cry out to whom he will, they will all answer, as the king to the woman, 'If the Lord do not help,' &c.

Why, then, must the burdened sinner perish? Is there no remedy? Yes, the Lord has laid help on one that is mighty. Christ is willing, and he is only able to ease the burdened soul. He invites him to come; he will take the burden on himself, rather than the soul shall sink under it. Now, the sinner hearing this, it is glad tidings indeed to him: he closes with Christ, rolls himself, casts his burdened soul upon him, and so believes. For a sinner thus burdened, thus sensible of the weight of sin, to roll himself upon Christ, is to believe in him.

5. To believe in Christ, is to apply him. It is an intimate application, such as that of meat and drink by one pinched with hunger, and fainting with thirst. Hence faith is expressed by eating, John vi. 51, 53, 54, 56. To eat there, is to believe. It is not sacramental eating, as some mistake it; for then all that partake not of that ordinance should be damned (no infants should be saved), and all that partake of it should be saved; whereas this is against experience, that against charity, both against truth. But it is a spiritual eating, that is, believing, as we are led by the coherence to expound it, verse 35. That which is eating here, is there

coming (fiducial coming); and that which is drinking here, is there believing. So in the Old Testament, טָמַן, ordinarily rendered to trust, rely, or stay on one, does also signify to nourish, to refresh and comfort, as one fainting is refreshed with wine: Cant. ii. 5, טַמְכוּנִי, 'Stay me with flaggons;' and the only other word untouched, which the Old Testament uses for faith, אָמַן, signifies in Kal *nutrire*, in Hiphil *fidere*. This is enough to evince that faith is an application, such an application of Christ as that of nourishment to one that is hungry. And this tends something to discover the nature of this act, which we shall make evident by a Scripture allusion, Gen. xxi. The state of Hagar and her son in the desert resembles the state of a sinner in unbelief. They are for their insolency cast out of Abraham's family; they wander, and lose themselves in the wilderness; and, which is worse, their provision is quite spent, and nothing is to be looked for but a miserable death. Nay, death is already seizing on Ishmael; he faints, and she not enduring to see him die in this extremity, withdraws herself, lifts up her voice, and weeps, verse 16. Now the Lord, pitying them in this forlorn condition, shews her a well of water. Oh with what great eagerness, do ye think, with what greediness, does she apply this water, to save the life of her dying child! Thus it is with a sinner; he is cast out from the presence of God for his rebellion; he wanders, and loses God, and then loses himself. In this sad condition his provisions are spent, he has nothing to support his soul, nothing to feed on but wind. His soul faints and languishes, and lies gasping even at the gates of eternal death. This is his sad condition, and this he apprehends when the Lord begins to work faith; and oh with what anguish does the apprehension thereof afflict him! Nothing can save his soul from death but a draught of the water of life, a taste of Christ. The Lord in this extremity discovers Christ, opens his eyes to see the fountain of life opened in the gospel. And when the sinner, in sense of his dying condition, applies Christ for life, then he believes. When the soul takes in this water of life as greedily as the hunted hart, who in danger of death, both from burning thirst within, and the eager pursuers without, pants after, and plunges himself in the water-brooks: when the soul, in sense of such extremities from the indignation of God on all sides, takes in this water of life as he would take in life itself, then he believes, Ps. xlii. 1, 2.

6. To believe in Christ is to receive him, John i. 12. Receiving is explained by believing; so that to receive is to believe on him, Col. ii. 6, 7. As faith has taken root by this first act of receiving, so let it grow strong and fruitful. Sometimes the object of it is otherwise expressed; so that to believe in Christ is to receive his righteousness, and to receive remission of sins. And these expressions give light to discover the nature of this act, as we shall improve them by a similitude or two.

A poor man over head and ears in debt, who owes more than he can pay, if himself and all that he has were sold for payment. The serjeants arrest him, and hale him to prison, and there he is like to spend all his days miserably in a dungeon; while he is afflicted with the sad apprehension of his misery, and even at the prison door, and one offers him a sum that will discharge all that he owes, oh how will the poor man be transported with such an offer! how joyfully will he receive it, though it were upon condition that he should be his benefactor's servant all his life!

The case is parallel. Sinners are debtors to the great God. Sins are called ὀφειλήματα, Mat. vi. 12. The least sin is such a debt, as the sinner's body and soul is not of sufficient value to discharge it. But justice must



be satisfied, and in default hereof, the sinner is every moment in danger to be cast into hell, and must not come out till he have paid that which he can never pay, the utmost farthing.

Now while the sensible soul is dejected with these apprehensions, Christ in the gospel offers him his righteousness, of such value that it will satisfy the utmost demand of justice.

Now when the sinner receives this with such an open heart, such a transported soul, as a debtor dragged to prison would receive a jewel able to satisfy all his creditors, when he thus receives it, he believes, Rom. v. 17. This gift of righteousness is that which is elsewhere called our λύτρον, the price of our redemption. To receive this, is to believe. For that which is receiving the gift of righteousness, ver. 17, and receiving the atonement, verse 11, is styled, being justified by faith, verse 1.

To believe, is to receive remission of sins, Acts xxvi. 18. And this affords another simile, to illustrate the matter in hand.

A condemned person upon the scaffold, all the instruments of death ready, and nothing wanting but one blow to separate soul and body, while he is possessed with sad apprehensions of death, one unexpectedly comes, and brings him a pardon. Oh how will his heart welcome it! How will his hands receive it, as though his soul were in his hands! So here.

A sinner, while in unbelief, is condemned already, he has received the sentence of death in himself; and there remains nothing but a fearful expectation of judgment, and the fiery indignation, nothing but an expectation of execution, but a step betwixt him and the eternal death. He hears the gospel in this condition offering mercy, and proclaiming a pardon through the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now for the dying soul to revive at these glad tidings, to welcome Christ, to receive him for the remission of sins, as the condemned person with his neck upon the block would receive a pardon, is to believe, Acts x. 43.

7. To believe in Christ, is to apprehend him, to lay hold of him, to embrace him: Rom. ix. 30, 'have attained to righteousness.' The best Latin translators render *κατέλαβει*, by *apprehenderunt*, have apprehended, have laid hold on the righteousness of faith, i. e., the righteousness of Christ, who is the Lord our righteousness, the proper object of justifying faith. Now what it is to apprehend the righteousness of Christ, or Christ who is our righteousness, we are taught, verse 33. So that to believe on him, and to apprehend his righteousness, is all one.

It is to embrace Christ, Heb. xi. 13; *ἀσπασάμενοι*; they had not yet received the promises, i. e., the things promised. Christ was not yet exhibited, he was afar off; but he was offered in the promise, there they embraced him, i. e., believed on him. For there the apostle is giving an account of the several acts of faith, whereof this is the principal, to embrace Christ in the promise.

And this we may improve to discover the nature of this saving act, Mat. xiv. 29–31. There Peter was so bold, as to come out of the ship and walk upon the waters. But when the tempest grew strong, then his heart fails him, and then he begins to sink, and sinking he cries out, Lord, save me! Christ, seeing him ready to perish, stretches out his hand, or, as some render it, takes him by the hand, and so cures him. Answerably here.

To walk in the ways of sin, is to walk as it were upon the waters; there is no sure footing, how bold soever sinners are to venture. If patience were not infinite, we should sink every moment. The sensible sinner, he

begins to see his danger, patience will long ere withdraw, it will not be always abused ; a tempest of wrath will arise ; nay, he finds it grow boisterous, it does already ruffle his conscience, he is as sure to sink, as if he were walking upon the waves. Nay, he feels his soul already sinking ; no wonder if he cry out as a lost man, as one ready to be swallowed up in a sea of wrath.

But now Christ stretches out his hand in the gospel. Now for the soul in sense of its sinking state, to stretch out itself to lay hold on that everlasting arm, that only can save him from going down into the bottomless pit, this is to believe, Cant. iii. 4, *apprehendi eum* ;\* to hold him, as one falling from a steep place, in danger to be dashed in pieces, holds a branch, a bough that he meets with, that he catches at in his fall ; to hold Christ, as that only which can stay him, when he finds himself falling into hell and eternal destruction ; to embrace, as he would embrace life, glory, happiness.

This may be sufficient to discover the nature of faith. But for further evidence, observe what is included in it, as appears by the former.

1. Sense of misery. It is a sensible dependence. Faith presupposes sense of misery. When the Lord brings a sinner to believe, he makes him thoroughly apprehensive of his miserable condition by reason of sin and wrath ; he not only assents to it, but is sensible of it.

A man that has read or heard much of the sad effects of war, he may assent, believe that it is a great misery to be infected with war. Ay, but when the enemy is at his door, when they are driving his cattle, and plundering his goods, and firing his houses, he not only assents to it, but he sees, he feels the miseries of it ; he has more sensible, more affecting apprehensions of it than ever. A sinner that continues in unbelief, hearing the threatenings, the wrath denounced against unbelievers, he may assent to this, that unbelievers are in a miserable condition ; but when the Lord is working faith, he brings this home to himself ; he sees justice ready to seize on him, he feels wrath kindling upon him. He now not only believes it, but has a quick sense of it. He has often heard of the misery of such a condition by the hearing of the ear, but now his eye sees it, and he sees it so as his eye affects his heart. He has often heard of the burden and danger of sin, but now he feels it. He apprehends himself at the point of sinking under it. He has often heard how terrible the wrath of God is, but looking on it at a distance, it did no more affect him than a painted fire ; ay, but now he feels the heat of it, it begins to kindle in his soul, and scorch his conscience. He has heard of dreadful threatenings and curses denounced against such and such sins, but he looked upon them as at a distance, as discharged at random ; ay, but now he sees them levelled at himself, his soul in the butt, the mark to which those arrows aim and are directed, and the poison thereof drinks up his spirits. He reads and hears the terrible things denounced against sin, as though he were another man, and is affected with them as though they were not the same things. He wonders at his former stupidity. This thunder is not afar off, but it startles him, as though he were even in the thunder-cloud. Till it be thus in some degree, he will not believe, will not come to Christ, till they not only enter his fancy and understanding, but prick his heart. The physician is neglected, while the patient thinks himself in health. The whole, i. e., those that think themselves whole, see no need of the great physician. Till the sinner apprehend himself, his soul sick unto death, Christ is not

\* *Mercor.*

looked after. The malefactor will never sue for a pardon to purpose, till he be (or apprehend himself in danger to be) condemned. No flying to this stronghold, till there be some fear of pursuers. There will be no flying to Christ, no believing in him, without some sense of misery. Lot would never have fled to the mountain, but that the country was all in a flame, Gen. x. 28.

2. A rejecting of other dependences, other supports. It is a sole depending, a relying upon Christ alone. While the sinner depends upon anything else, in himself, or without himself, for safety, he believes not on Christ, he stands no longer upon\* his own legs. While the sinner stands upon his own bottom, his own righteousness, his good meaning, good nature, good deeds, his charitableness or religiousness, his being better than others, or not so bad as most, and upon this raises hopes of pardon, he is far from faith, he is but in the condition of the unjustified Pharisee. But when he looks upon these as no greater securities than tow or stubble would be, to shroud him from a consuming fire, then he will look out for a better screen to interpose betwixt his soul and that fiery indignation that his sins have kindled.

When the soul, feeling the flame of wrath kindling on her, cries out as one that is already perishing, None but Christ, none but Christ, then he is in the highway to faith.

If the dove which Noah sent out could have found rest for the sole of her feet elsewhere, she would not have returned unto the ark, Gen. viii. 12. Such an averseness there is in our natures to Christ, as he is the last thing a sinner looks after. If he can rest in anything else, if he can find rest in his friends, in his boon companions, in his accommodations, in his worldly employments, in his religious duties, in his good accomplishments; if he find rest to the sole of his foot here, the ark is forgotten, he returns not to Christ. But when he sees a deluge of wrath overwhelm him, when the waters of God's wrath rise so high as nothing appears but the ark, nothing to rest on but Christ, nothing but drowning and perishing in the common deluge, except he get into the ark, then he rests not till he gets into Christ, then he flies to him as for his life. See faith thus working in Ephraim, Hosea xiv. 4. They reject all foreign dependences: 'Asshur shall not save us;' they reject all dependence on themselves: 'we will not ride,' &c. They reject all that they had formerly idolised, and that by relying on them, they knew that this was the high way to mercy. None but the fatherless, *οἱ ὀρφανοὶ*. Till the sinner apprehend himself as an orphan, without strength, without counsel, all his supports dead which were a father to him, he will not betake himself to Christ as his only guardian; till he thus betake himself to Christ, he believes not.

3. Submission. Faith is a very submissive grace. Sin and wrath lie so heavy, as the soul is bended to what the Lord will. If he will but pardon me, says the humbled sinner, if he will but forgive me, let him deal with me otherwise as seems good in his eyes. If he will but shew mercy, let the Lord do it when and how he pleases. Ps. xxxvii. 7, 'Rest,' that is, trust; but the word is *דָּמָה*, 'be silent to the Lord.' That is the temper of faith, whatever the Lord says or does, the believing soul is silent. He is sensible of so much sinfulness and wretchedness, as worse cannot be said of him than he is, worse cannot be inflicted on him than he deserves; and therefore let the Lord say of him, and do with him what he pleases, he puts his mouth in the dust, and is silent. Only let his life be given

\* Qu. 'stands upon'?—Ed.

him, the life of his soul, and however otherwise the Lord proceeds, he will not reply. If the Lord say, he shall continue upon the rack of terror, he submits; only, says he, Lord, save my life, let me have that for a prey. If the Lord say, though he pardon him, yet he will make him exemplary by sharp afflictions, that the contagion of his example may not spread, O Lord, says he, only spare my life; whatever is not hell is mercy to such a wretch as I am.

The sinner has been battered by the law, justice does besiege him, wrath is ready to assault, he sees himself reduced to extremity, he stands not upon terms, indents not with the besieger, but yields at discretion, will be at the mercy of the conqueror, cautious for nothing but his life, stands upon nothing but his soul, that this may not perish for ever. Whatever is not death, whatever is not eternal wrath, is infinite mercy to such a rebel as I have been. If the shipwrecked man can get to shore, can save himself from drowning, he regards not the wetting of his clothes, the spoiling of his goods; a greater matter is in danger; so it is with a sinner, in whom faith is working. His soul is in a sea of wrath, he is ready to sink; if he can but reach Christ, get to shore, he is content, though he come there naked, stripped of all that was otherwise dear to him. For why? His soul is in danger; if the Lord let that escape, come what will come else, he submits, he is silent.

4. Resolution to persist in his dependence. It is a resolute dependence, he is resolved to keep his hold whatever the event be. He knows justice is incensed, and the wrath of God is kindled against him, and whether or no the Lord may proceed to destroy him, he knows not; but he apprehends withal that there is no other way to pacify the Lord, no other way to escape wrath, but by casting himself on Christ, and therefore he resolves to persist in it.

It is with him as with Esther in her undertaking for the Jews, Esther iv. 16. If she should go, and the king not hold forth the golden sceptre to her, she was but a dead woman; but then if she did not go there was no other way to save her and her nation from ruin, and therefore she resolves, 'I will go in unto the king, and if I perish, I perish.' So here, if I go to Christ (thinks the trembling sinner), and take sanctuary in him, it may be justice may pursue me thither; Oh, but if I go not, then there is nothing for me but certain destruction; thereupon he resolves, I will go to Christ, I will lay hold on him, and if I perish I will perish there; if wrath seize on me, it shall find me in the arms of Christ; if I die, I will die at his feet.

When Joab had fled for refuge to the tabernacle, and caught hold of the horns of the altar, Benaiah, sent to execute him, bids him leave his sanctuary: 1 Kings ii. 30, 'Thus says the king, Come forth.' 'Nay,' says Joab, 'but I will die here;' if there be no mercy for me, no remedy but I must die, I will die here.

Thus the humbled sinner when he has taken sanctuary in Christ, and laid hold of Christ; when Satan or his own guilty soul tell him that he must come forth, there is no mercy for such a traitor, such a heinous offender; nay, says the believing soul, but if I must die, I will die here; if justice smite me, it shall smite me with Christ in my arms; though he kill me, yet will I rely on him; here will I live, or here will I die; I will not quit my hold, though I die for it.

This his resolution as to his former evil way. He will not quit his hold of Christ, to return to his former courses, though he die here. As the

three children, Dan. iii. 17, 18, 'The Lord on whom I rely is able to deliver me ; but if not,' I will never serve my lusts any more.

5. Support. It is an establishing dependence. The heart that trusts, that relies on Christ, is in some degree or other fixed, more or less established : Ps. cxii. 7, 8, 'His heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.' His heart is established, **TRUST**, rendered to *trust*, to *lean* ; transitive signifies to *underprop* : Ps. lxxi. 6, 'By thee have I been holden up from the womb.' A man cast into the sea scrambles up to a rock to secure him ; the rock is firm enough, able to support ; ay, but the apprehension of his late danger has left impressions of fear on him ; he is still timorous ; though he be above the water, he knows not but a storm may blow him off, or a wave may wash him again into the deep.

Christ is the rock of ages ; he that stays on him stands firm ; he cannot but have some support for the present, though he has little confidence, no assurance. He cannot yet say, The Lord will shew me mercy, I shall have pardon, he will be reconciled, I shall be saved ; he cannot conclude this certain. Though there be *certitudo objecti*, yet not *certitudo subjecti* ; though it be sure he shall not perish, yet he is not sure, he is not fully persuaded of it. Only this he has to support him, it may be the Lord will pity me, will shew mercy. He has that which was Benhadad's support in his great extremity, 1 Kings xx. 31. The Lord is a merciful king, and this is the only way to find mercy, peradventure he will save my life. Who knows but the Lord may be reconciled ? Who can tell ? Jonah iii. 9. This bears up the heart at present, and by degrees he finds more and more support. It is with him as with the lepers, 2 Kings vii. 8, 4 : 1, he may ; 2, he will ; 3, he has.

6. A consent to accept Christ on his own terms. This is included in the phrase of coming to Christ, and receiving him, whereby faith is ordinarily expressed. For we must not understand by coming, any corporal motion, but a motion of the soul. Now the will is *anima locomotiva facultas*, the soul's moving faculty, the organ whereby it performs this motion ; it moves to an object by consent, and from an object by dissent. When it consents to take Christ, it comes to him ; it is included in the phrase of receiving Christ ; for this is an act of the soul too ; and the will is the soul's receptive power ; it is as the hand of the soul, which closes when it dissents, and opens when it consents. The will is naturally closed against Christ, but consent opens it ; and when the will is open to receive him, it always receives him ; when it opens, it consents ; when it consents, it receives, *i. e.*, believes.

II. Of the object. Having largely opened the act of saving faith, it remains that I declare what the object of it is ; for virtues, as other habits, being defined by their acts and objects, as being their prime essentials, the essence and nature of this saving faith will be apparent when to the explication of its acts I have added a declaration of its object.

Now, this I shall endeavour, 1, in general ; 2, more distinctly in some particular propositions.

1. In general. The object of justifying or saving faith is Christ ; it is he by and in whom faith seeks pardon and salvation. For this purpose to him a believer flies, on him he leans and rolls himself, to him he cleaves and clings. It is Christ he applies, receives, apprehends, and embraces when he would obtain pardon and life. I should rehearse to you a great part of the gospel if I should allege all those testimonies which the Scrip-

ture gives to this truth, Gal. ii. 16, Acts xvi. 31, Rom. ix. 33, Gal. iii. 26, 1 Peter ii. 6, John iii. 16, 18, 36.

## 2. More particularly.

(1.) The whole word of God is the adequate and general object of faith, when faith is taken for assent. Saving faith believes the histories, the precepts, the threatenings; but as it believes these, it is not saving; for those that shall not be saved, viz., the devils and reprobates, may believe as much. Justifying faith assents to the whole, but it does not justify as it assents to the whole, but as it rests on Christ; even as the hand which feeds the body hath many offices, to work, to receive, to defend; but it feeds not, but as it conveys nourishment to the mouth. As the rational soul has many powers and acts besides the power to understand,—it remembers, and wills, and fancies, but it understands not but as it apprehends the truth of its object,—so justifying faith has many acts besides that whereby it justifies: it believes the threatenings, yields to the commands, assents to the historical relations of the word, but it justifies only as it respects Christ. So that the whole word of God is not the proper and specifical object of saving faith.

(2.) The mercy of God is but a partial object of faith. A partial, I say, because this alone is not enough to give faith any hold. Faith can find no mercy to pitch on but in and through Christ, nor is there any mercy for a sinner out of him. Therefore Christ must be added before mercy can be an ample object for faith to fix on. Christ is the only mercy-seat of faith. Would it find mercy? it must seek it where it is to be found, where it is seated: Rom. iii. 25, *ὃν προέβητο ὁ Θεὸς ἱλαστήριον*, whom God has placed as a mercy-seat; the same word, Heb. ix. 5, *κατασπάζοντα τὸ ἱλαστήριον*. The mercy-seat in the tabernacle was a type of Christ; and the posture of it is no more mysterious than comfortable, Exod. xxv. It was the covering of the ark, above it were the cherubims of glory, the seat of the divine Majesty; and therefore he is said to sit betwixt the cherubims, Ps. lxxx. 1. Under it were the tables of the covenant, or of the testimony, as it is called, Exod. xxv.; i.e., of the law, which bears testimony against sinners, which accuses, curses, condemns. Christ the mercy-seat is interposed betwixt the judge and the condemning law. Take away Christ, and nothing can be expected from the Judge but the law in its rigour, law without mercy. As the law will shew no mercy, that is all for justice, so the Lord will shew no mercy but on the mercy-seat, none but through Christ. Christ must be added to make mercy a complete, a fit object for faith. Without him it is but a partial object, if any at all. Mercy through Christ is faith's object. If faith pitch on mercy without him, it will pitch upon that which will not support it.

(3.) The promises of the gospel, they are the less principal, the subservient objects of faith. The promise is as the dish wherein Christ, the bread of life, the manna from heaven, is set before faith, and presented to it. Both are served up together; but faith feeds not on the dish, but on the manna, the bread of life in it.

The promise is as a glass, a prospective, wherein the Day-star, the Sun of Righteousness is discerned. When we make use of a glass to discover a star, we look upon both; but our sight is not terminated in the glass, the use of it is to be subservient to a farther discovery, to be helpful to our sight to discover the star, which is the principal object. So faith, 'with open face,' does, in the promise, 'as in a glass behold the glory of God,' take a view of Christ who is the brightness of his Father's glory.

The promise is but subservient to that happy, that delightful sight of Christ. And therefore I call it a subservient object, a mediate, less principal object.

(4.) The proper and principal object of faith is the person of Christ; not the promise of Christ, not the benefits of Christ, but the person of Christ; not the promise, as we shewed before. Faith is not an assent to a proposition affirmed, but affiance in a Saviour offered; not the benefits firstly and principally. Faith unites the soul to Christ; it is the bond of our conjugal union. Now, we marry not the dowry, but the person.

That faith respects Christ himself in the first place, appears by the notions of faith, which we may collect from Scripture.

Faith is the *hand* of the soul; so it receives Christ himself, who is the gift of God, John iv. 10.

It is the *arm* of the soul; so it embraces Christ, Cant. iii. 4.

It is the *eye* of the soul; so it looks upon Christ, as the stung Israelites upon the brazen serpent, John iii. 14, 15.

It is the *mouth* of the soul; so it feeds on Christ the bread from heaven, John vi. 32-34.

It is the *foot* of the soul; so it comes to Christ, Mat. xi., John vi.

It is the *lips* of the soul; so it kisses Christ, Ps. ii. In all it has an immediate respect to Christ, to his person.

(5.) The person of Christ, as invested with his righteousness, is the formal object. Not the person of Christ barely considered, but as clothed with a righteousness qualifying him to a Mediator, a Saviour; as one that has fulfilled the law and satisfied justice in whatever it could demand on our behalf. As Christ without this would not be a Saviour, so without this he cannot be the object of saving faith: Rom. iii. 25, 'Through faith in his blood;' where blood, being the most signal part of his satisfaction, is put for his whole righteousness. Here is in this verse whatever is assigned as a special object of faith. Here is Christ and his righteousness expressly the formal object; faith in his blood, called ἀπολύτρωσις, ver. 24, through the redemption, i. e., through the satisfaction of Christ, who paid a satisfactory price (α λύτρον) that captive sinners might be delivered. And that price was his righteousness, here called his blood: *ut significetur fidem non aliud quam ad Christi sacrificium ferri.*

The person of Christ, the principal object, in the particle ἐν, Jesus Christ, whom, &c.

The gospel, the subservient object, intimated in προέθετο, whom God has set forth; as in the decree and in his understanding, so in the gospel, now seen, Rev. xi. 19.

The mercy of God the partial object, to be a propitiation, a mercy-seat, and this by his blood: *ut per hostiam corporis sui hominibus propitium faceret Deum.\** Faith does, in the business of our justification, embrace whole Christ; but it is properly terminated in his blood.† That is the proper (as I take it), the formal object of saving faith, that righteousness by virtue of which Christ is a Saviour.

(6.) The benefits of Christ are but the secondary objects of faith, Rom. viii. 32; they seem more properly to be the end of faith. We depend not upon pardon or salvation, but upon Christ for pardon and salvation; and that not as having obtained, but that we may obtain them.

\* Origen.

† Fides totum Christum amplectitur, et proprie in ejus sanguine terminatur.—*Pareus.*

Faith at first relies on Christ, not as one that has pardoned sin, but as one through whom alone pardon is to be obtained. The persuasion that sin is pardoned is a consequent of justifying faith, it is not the justifying act.

III. How does the Lord work faith? That is the next thing we undertook to shew, in what manner, by what steps and degrees, the Lord ordinarily proceeds when he brings a sinner to believe. Having giving an account of the act and object, let us see how the Lord brings the act and object together.

But, 1, we shall not attempt to shew how this is wrought in infancy or those of unriper years, for that is a secret; the Scripture seems reserved in this case, and secret things belong not to us.

And, 2, there are some extraordinary cases wherein the Lord proceeds not in the ordinary method. He ties not himself to one track. He is a most free agent, and works as when, so how, he pleases. We shall only follow him in the ordinary, the beaten road, where his footsteps are visible by Scripture and experience.

And, 3, in ordinary cases there is great variety in respect of circumstances; it may be as much variety as there is in faces. Now, as no limner will undertake to draw a piece that shall exactly resemble every face in every feature and lineament, though, without any curious inspection of particulars, he may draw one that will easily distinguish a man from any other creature, so we will not undertake to give such a discovery as will exactly answer every one's experience in circumstances, but such as may be sufficient to distinguish a saving work from that which is but common to those that are not sound believers. And this will be very useful, both for discovering faith where it is, and for direction where it is not, to shew what way they must walk in who would attain it. To proceed then.

The Lord, when he works faith in those that enjoy the gospel, and are capable of improving it, doth ordinarily proceed by these steps, and brings them to believe by these degrees.

1. A discovery of sin, which the Lord makes by the law and by the Spirit, Rom. vii. 7. The law of God is a light. A sinner, while he continues in unbelief, he shuts it out as an unwelcome guest; hates the light, John iii. 20; but now the Lord brings it into the soul and conscience, and this discovers sin to purpose. In the dark great things seem small, and small things are not discerned; while in security, great sins are extenuated, neglected, and small sins are not at all taken notice of, but this makes a discovery of great and small.

The Spirit of God concurs with the law. It is his office, and one of the first he performs to the unbelieving world, John xvi. 8, *ἐλέγξει*. Before he convince of righteousness, he shall make evident their sin, give them a demonstration of it, make their sin manifest. That is the import of the word, *ἐλεγχος γὰρ ἐστὶ λῆαν δηλῶν*,\* a clear manifestation.

This is the first thing he works by the ministry of the word, when it is effectual, Acts xxvi. 18, to open their eyes, before he turn them to God, before they receive forgiveness of sin, before they have faith to receive it: He opens their eyes, &c. They were as blind men before, but now they see sin in its colours. Their apprehensions of sin now differ as much from those they had of it formerly, as the conceits which a blind man has of colours differ from his apprehensions of them when his eyes are opened. He apprehends his sins in their number and danger, guilt and stain, weight

\* Chrysost.



and heinousness, in their dishonouring and incensing quality as to God, in their defiling and damning power as to himself.

The Spirit of God removes all excuses which he made use of to extenuate sin, make it seem light, and keep the weight of it from his conscience; now he looks on it as aggravated, as exceeding sinful, exceeding damnable.

And though this discovery begin with some one particular sin, which the Lord sets home to the conscience, as the apostle first convinced the Jews of their sin in crucifying Christ, Acts ii., yet usually it rests not in one, but proceeds to more. As a man run much in debt is first arrested for one sum, but when he is clapped up, then one action is laid on him after another, till he be charged with the whole debt; so after the sinner is under this arrest of the law, when one sin has seized effectually on the conscience, the rest (as David said of his enemies) like bees, &c., he can say with a sad heart, 'Lord, how are they increased that trouble me.'

As the Lord led Ezekiel from one place to another, and the further he went the greater abominations he discerned, Ezek. viii. 6, from the door of the court, ver. 7, to the door of the gate of the Lord's house, ver. 14, and from thence to the inner court, ver. 16; so the Spirit of the Lord leads the sinner from one part of his house to another, from one room, one faculty of his soul to another, and still discovers greater, more and more abominations; leads him from the profaneness of his ordinary conversation to the sins of his religious duties, and from the sins of his life to the sins of his heart, from the streams of sin in his actions to the spring of sin which bubbles up continually in every part of his soul, Job xiii. 26. He brings to mind the sins that he has forgotten, makes him possess the sins of his youth, of his youngest years; though he had let them slip out of his mind, yet the Lord takes a course to retain them, he seals them up in a bag, Job xiv. 17. And now the bag is opened, and the sinner sees what he is to reckon for, he cries out as the prophet's servant: 2 Kings vi. 15, 'How shall we do?' and as David, Ps. xxxviii. 4, 'Mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden, they are too heavy for me.'

2. Application of the desert of sin. The Lord convinces him that all those dreadful things which are denounced against sin belong to him, so that he applies them in particular to himself. He not only apprehends in general what is due to sin, the curses and threatenings of the law, the sentence of condemnation, the wrath of God, &c., but he applies these in particular: I have sinned thus and thus, and these are due to my sins, and therefore these are my portion.

Heretofore he looked upon these in general without any personal application; or if he applied them it was to others: Such and such a notorious sinner, these will fall heavy upon him, but I am not so wicked, mercy will keep off these from me. Oh, but now these are laid at his own door; his conscience tells him (as Nathan did David), 'Thou art the man.' So he takes it to himself: I am the man whom the Lord threatens, whom the law condemns, whom justice pursues, whose portion is the wrath of God, who am sentenced to death. He looks not upon the tempest of wrath as afar off, as that which may spend itself before it reach him, but he feels it beat upon his own vessel, ready to sink it; the sea of wrath works and is tempestuous about him, and his conscience speaks, as Jonah i. 12, 'I know that for my sake this great tempest is come,' it is I, that vengeance follows; it is I, that in justice and sentence of law stand condemned to eternal death.

He comes not to the assizes as formerly, to be a spectator, to see others tried and condemned. He sees himself now at the bar, himself arraigned

and indicted, he cannot but plead guilty. He is clearly cast in law, and he hears the sentence of condemnation as though his name were writ in the Scripture, as though the Lord did by name pronounce sentence against him.

This is the work of the spirit of bondage, of which, Rom. viii. 15, where observe the order and opposition.

The *order*. The spirit of bondage goes before the spirit of adoption; again, intimating plainly, they had received the spirit of bondage formerly, viz., before they had received the spirit of adoption. They had fearful apprehensions of wrath, before they had the assurances of a Father's love.

The *opposition*. These two spirits are opposed in their works. The work of the spirit of adoption is to witness together without our spirits, the spirit of believers, that they are the children [of God]; and, therefore, the work of the spirit of bondage is to witness together with the spirits, the consciences of unbelievers that they are the children of wrath.

And as the spirit of adoption works this comfortable assurance by way of a practical reasoning, in like manner does the spirit of bondage give in the contrary testimony by way of a syllogism. 'Cursed is every one that continues,' &c. But I have continued in practices quite against the law, *ergo*, I am cursed. 'The wages of sin is death;' but thousands of sins lie upon my charge, *ergo*, eternal death is due to me. 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven,' &c. But I am guilty of so much ungodliness, so much unrighteous; *therefore* what remains but that the wrath of God should be revealed from heaven against me? The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord, 2 Thes. i. 7, 8, but I have disobeyed the gospel, and, *therefore* (unless salvation come by the Lord Jesus Christ), I shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of God, verse 9. 'He that believes not is condemned already,' John iii. 'The wrath of God abides on him;' but I have continued in unbelief, *ergo*, I am condemned, the wrath of God abides on me, and (unless some gracious provision be made for my perishing soul) I shall be damned. This application, &c., is another step to faith. And though the condition of a sinner under these convictions seem sad, yet is far more hopeful than the state of those who continue secure and senseless, because they are in the way, they are upon the anvil; and though the law be a hammer to them (as the word is called, Jer. xxiii. 29), and the strokes thereof be terrible, yet this is the way to be polished, to be made fit stones for Christ's temple, for the New Jerusalem; whereas secure sinners are as stones in the quarry, far off from that which is but a preparative to faith and salvation.

8. *Compunction*. The soul is wounded with the apprehensions of sin and wrath; the weight of them lie heavy upon his conscience, they enter as iron into his soul: Acts ii. 37, 'When they heard this,' when their sin was applied particularly, ye have crucified, verses 36 and 23, and apprehended what was due in particular for such a horrid act, 'they were pricked at the heart,' *κατενύγησαν*, it pierced their hearts as though they had been run through with a sword or a spear. So the word is used I A. O. *ὡς αὐτοὶ ἐξέπειν τὴν καὶ ἔγχεσιν*. Such acute anguish, such piercing grief, did wound their souls, as though a sword had lanced their very hearts, Jer. vi. 4. It is a rending of the heart elsewhere, Joel ii. 13, a ploughing up of the heart. The law armed with wrath makes deep furrows in the heart. Now what anguish will follow such a rending, a wounding of the heart, we may imagine; but our thoughts and our words will come short of the sinner's sense.

The issue of such a particular application of wrath must needs be fear, horror, anguish, and fearful expectations of judgment. The very discourse of this made Felix to tremble, Acts xxiv. 25, much more might the gaoler tremble, who had the sense of it, Acts xvi. 29.

The Lord sometimes makes use of outward providences, the sight or report of some fearful judgment, or the quick apprehensions of death, to startle the sinner, and likewise to bring him to the sense of his misery. These may be subservient to the word, to begin or increase this consternation of the soul, as we see the earthquake was to the gaoler, verse 28.

And the Lord, when he makes his word effectual, he fixes the eye of the soul upon these sad things, holds it to them. This is grievous to nature, the sinner will be inclined to shake off these sad thoughts, and Satan will be ready to offer him diversions enough, to draw him to his jovial companions, that he may drown or sing away these cares, or to engage him in deep worldly business, that the noise of the world may drown the cries of his conscience. He will tempt him to shake them off, as Felix did when he began to tremble at Paul's preaching of judgment, 'Go thy way for this time; when I have convenient season I will call for thee,' ver. 25. Or carnal friends, &c. Ay, but when the Lord intends hereby to fit the soul for Christ, he prevents this diversion, he holds the iron in the furnace until it be malleable; he fixes the eye upon sin and wrath, so that whithersoever he turns, his sin is with him, and hell before him; the cry of sin, and the curse of the law, is ever in his ears, Ps. li. 8. The pillar of fire leaves him not till he be on the borders of Canaan, till it leads him to the Lord Jesus Christ.

He continues him under the spirit of bondage, where work is fear, Rom. viii.; he abides under these fears, this anguish, hanging as it were by a thread over the bottomless pit, till he be fit for the glad tidings of the gospel.

But hence observe, the Lord is very various in this dispensation, both as to the continuance of those fears and terrors, as also to the measure and degree of them. Some lie long upon the rack of terror; to others he does but as it were shew the torture. Some lie long under the pangs of the new birth, their throes are strong, and many others have a more quick and easy delivery. The apprehensions of wrath seize upon some as an earthquake, which makes the foundations of the soul to shake, and with violence breaks or unhinges the door of the heart; in others, the door is unlocked, the bolts knocked off with a blow or two, and the heart opened to Christ in a gentler way. Some are led through these dreadful visions of wrath, even to the pit of despair; others have a door opened, when they are newly come into this valley of the shadow of death.

It is the Lord's design in all upon whom he thus works, to make them sick of sin; but in some it is a burning, a raging fever; in others it is but as a stomach sickness, which makes them loathe sin, and vomit it up as bitter and nauseous.

But though this humiliation be in some more, in some less, both as to time and degree, yet in all, when the Lord draws to believe, there is so much as to drive them utterly out of themselves unto the Lord Jesus.

4. Inquiry, how he shall avoid this misery, what he shall do to be freed from that burden of sin and wrath, which is ready to sink him; what he shall do to pacify that wrath that burns like fire, and is ready to devour; how he shall satisfy that justice which pursues, and is every moment ready to smite him dead; what course he shall take to escape those everlasting burnings, into which he is in danger to fall every hour? When Peter's sermon had wounded the Jews with sense of their sin, this is the imme-

diate issue of it, Acts ii. 37, 'What shall we do?' So in the gaoler; when the apprehension of his misery shook his soul, even as the earthquake shook the prison, Acts xvi. 30, it puts him upon this inquiry, 'What shall I do to be saved?' Nor does the sinner in this case inquire as upon the bye, carelessly, indifferently; but his whole soul puts itself forth in this inquiry. As a man run through with a sword has present death before his eyes, would inquire for a chirurgeon,—Oh for a chirurgeon, or else I die! or as one whose house is on fire, and the flames all about his ears, would inquire how he may quench it; or as a man upon the sea, when the waves and storms beat the ship upon the rock, when he apprehends the vessel broke, and the waters breaking in upon him, would inquire what he should do to escape death and drowning,—he inquires as for his life. He is not as one that comes to a shop to cheapen a commodity, indifferent whether he have it or no, unless he can get an extraordinary pennyworth; but he inquires as one that resolves to have it, whatever it costs him. He inquires of the way, as a soldier after a route inquires after a stronghold: he is pursued by the enemy, death is at his heels; he resolves to press in, if he can find the way, whatever danger or difficulty encounter him, Luke xvi. 16. John was the messenger of the Lord, sent before Christ to prepare the way for him, 'to prepare the way of the Lord,' &c. And this he does by declaring their sins, and the wrath of God coming upon them for sin, Mat. iii. 7, 10. Now when they were effectually possessed with the sense thereof, they press. The straitness of the gate, the crowd of impediments wherewith Satan, the world, their lusts stop up the way, shall not hinder them; they resolve to press through, to put their whole strength and might, as a man that would break through a thick crowd. An inquiry thus resolved is another step to faith.

5. A renunciation, a renouncing of all unsafe ways, all indirect courses, to procure peace. When the sinner comes to inquire what course he shall take, he may meet with many counsellors, and he does not always at first pitch upon the best. Satan and his carnal acquaintance will advise him to return to his former sinful courses, those that have been so delightful to him formerly, that in them he may find ease. If he follow this counsel, he is lost; but if this seem too gross, too dangerous, if the flame already kindled be so terrible as he dares not add fuel to it; if he be convinced that this is not the way to quench the fire, but to make it flame higher: it may be one more specious may be suggested; he will betake himself to hear and pray, to wait upon the ordinances, to reform some things amiss, and think hereby to pacify God, who seems so angry, to satisfy justice, which is so incensed, and so to get ease to his afflicted conscience. Ay, but if he rest here, he will never come to faith; and therefore when the Lord intends a saving work, he will not suffer him to rest in these. These are good in themselves, and necessary; but, if rested in, they are pernicious. The Lord will convince him that these are the way, not the end. To rest in them upon these terms is to make them saviours, not the way to a Saviour. He will shew him that these amount not to the least mite, whereas he owes ten thousand talents. He will shew him the sinfulness of them, that they are so far from satisfying, as that thereby he runs further upon the score; that these are so far from saving him, as that he needs a Saviour when he has done his best, lest the sins of his best deeds should condemn him. He knocks down these rotten pillars, on which the soul would find an unsafe support; so that he falls flat down under the sense of his sinfulness and impotency. He sees, for all that he has, or all

that he can do, he must perish, unless help be laid upon one that is more mighty. He empties him of all opinion of his own righteousness, of his own sufficiency. He spreads his net in the gospel to catch this lost sinner, that will else be a prey to Satan. Now, as fishermen, when they would be sure of a good draught, they beat the sides of the river; they know if the fish can lie secure in any hole, they will never come into the net; thus the Lord drives the sinner out of conceit of himself, out of every lurking-place, that he may run straight to Christ.

Faith is a flying to Christ. Now in this motion there is something from which, *a terminus à quo*; this is not only his own wickedness, but his own righteousness. This is the stronger hold of the two, and usually holds out longer. To drive him out of it, the Lord shews him the vanity and weakness of it, that it is but like those, Nah. iii. 12. The least blast of the Lord's displeasure will make them fall, as ripe figs in a storm of wind; that they are but as broken reeds, if he lean on them they will break under, pierce him rather than support, and let him fall into hell besides. He says to him, as Rabshakeh to Hezekiah, 2 Kings xviii. 21, 'If a man lean on it, it will go into his hand and pierce it.' And so he brings him to the apostle's opinion, who, Phil. iii. 8, counted his own privileges, righteousness, but as loss and dung. And now he is in the highway to Christ; there is but a step betwixt him and faith.

A soul in this distress, like a drowning man, will catch at every twig to save his life; but if the Lord intend to bring him to shore, he will not suffer him to trust to that, that will let him sink and sink with him; not trust to his own righteousness, performances, &c. He takes him not off from performing these, but from resting in them. Oh! alas! says the humbled soul, if I have nothing else to save me, I perish for ever. He sees these are but a refuge of lies: Isa. xxviii. 17, 'The hail shall sweep away,' &c. It is a deceitful refuge; I shall have nothing of what I expect from it. It is such a shelter, as a storm will beat down about my ears and sweep it away. If I take sanctuary in my duties, righteousness, these will not secure me. Justice will pluck me from the horns of these altars, and slay me. And therefore he looks further.

6. Revelation of Christ. When the Lord has brought him out of these by-ways wherein he would lose himself, he shews him the true way, the only way to pardon and life. When he has diverted him from his deceitful refuges, he shews the distressed sinner a city of refuge opened in Christ.

He shews him the glory and excellency of Christ, represents him as 'fairer than the children of men, the chiefest in ten thousand, and infinitely loving and lovely.'

He shews the sufficiency of Christ; that there is nothing can be required to deliver and enhappy a humbled sinner, but it is to be found in him; that he is able to save to the utmost, Heb. vii. 25.

He shews his necessity of Christ, that there is 'no other name,' &c. Acts iv. 12. No other sanctuary will secure, no other price will discharge him, and no other surety will be accepted.

He shews him a possibility that Christ may save and pardon him; he has pardoned such and such, whose sins were so great and so many; he came to save what was lost, and why not him?

He shews him a certainty of it in case he will believe, that he will cast off none that come to him; that he will lose none, suffer none to miscarry, that cast themselves on him.

The sinner has heard these things, it may be, often before, but he heard

them as though he heard them not. He was like the Jews when the veil was upon them; seeing, he saw, but perceived not; hearing, he heard, but understood not. Not because they were not clearly revealed, but because of his blindness, unbelief, carelessness; his carnal heart was not moved with spiritual discoveries, looked on them as not so much concerning him. He heard of this as a man with a full stomach hears of a feast; or as one that thinks himself above the fear of justice hears of a pardon; he finds no need of it, and so little regards it. Thus he heard of Christ before. Oh but now he hears these things as though he were another man, as though he had another soul. The report of Christ is glad tidings indeed. He hears of Christ as one in the executioner's hand, ready to die, hears of a pardon. He looks on Christ as one that has been all his days in a dungeon would look on the sun: 2 Cor. iv. 6, the discovery of Christ is to him as a glorious light shining on a sudden upon one in darkness. He was before in Satan's dungeon, as the apostle was before the revelation of Jesus Christ, verse 4; his eyes was put out. And besides, the object was veiled; he saw no more beauty in Christ than the Israelites saw glory in Moses's face when the veil was upon it, verse 8. But now his eye is opened, the veil is removed (for to that the apostle alludes), and he sees a glorious light, a glorious beauty in the face of Christ.

7. Hope. Though he despair as to himself, yet the Lord keeps him from despairing as to Christ. Though he have no hope in himself, yet 'there is hope in Israel,' there is hope in the gospel 'concerning this thing.' Though he be ready to sink under the pressure of sin and wrath, yet the discoveries of the gospel keep his head above water. He continues trembling under the apprehensions of wrath and misery, yet the Lord keeps him from falling quite down. The discoveries of Christ afford so much hope as somewhat strengthens the feeble knees, and yields some support to the trembling soul. He continues in a fluctuating condition, sometimes up, sometimes down, according as the impressions of law or gospel prevail, sometimes more, sometimes less. His feet are sometimes quite gone, his hold is lost, and he is ready to say, My hope is perished from me. Yet the Lord has made such provision in the gospel that though he fall, yet shall he rise; though he sink, yet will the Lord bring him up again. Some twig or other the Lord helps him to in the gospel, and holds him by it till he bring him to shore. He apprehends justice pursuing him, he hears it crying out to an incensed God, Shall I smite him? shall I smite? and he is in dreadful expectations of the fatal blow. Oh but he hears withal there is a sanctuary, there is a city of refuge set open in the gospel if he could but reach it; if he could but get into it, there is hopes for him, there he might be safe, there he might be secure from revenging justice. It never seized on any sinner that was fled thither for refuge.

He feels that sin has stung his soul; the sting of that fiery serpent is deadly, the poison thereof drinks up his spirits, he feels it even seizing upon his vitals; it has brought him even to the gates of death, all the art of men and angels cannot cure the wound. Oh but he hears withal there is a brazen serpent lifted up in the gospel, there is a healing, a sovereign virtue in Christ, there is balm in Gilead, there is a physician there, one that can heal a dying soul with a word, with a touch, nay, with a look. If he might have but a sight of him, might be admitted but to touch him, though it were but the hem of his garment, there is hopes. Though I were dead, yet should I live; no poison too deadly, too strong for that sovereign virtue that is in Christ.

He apprehends the waves and billows of God's indignation ready to go over him, ready to sweep him out of the land of the living; he knows not how soon he may be buried under those waves, under that wrath; he lives in a fearful expectation of it, and here the waves grow higher and higher. Oh but he hears withal there is an ark able to save him from that deluge, if he could but reach it; if he could but get into it, he might be safe; if Christ would but put forth his hand and take him in, he should be above that dreadful flood.

Wrath is due to thee, says the law, it is coming, thy damnation sleeps not; it is swift destruction, wrath will come upon thee speedily. Oh but, says the gospel, there is a Jesus, a Jesus that delivers from the wrath to come. Oh how sweet is that sentence to the sensible sinner, Jesus who delivers!

Alas, says the sensible sinner, I am but a dead man, the sentence of death is passed upon me, I am condemned already; I am now in the hands of justice, ready for execution. Oh but does not the gospel speak of a pardon? There is a pardon out for some that are condemned, here is some hope for me; though the sentence of condemnation be passed, yet it is not absolute; though I be cast in law, and judgment passed against me, yet if I could but believe, execution might be stopped. There is life to be had for some who have received sentence of death. My condition is not hopeless, unless my unbelief make it so, 1 John v. 11, 12. There is life for condemned wretches if they believe. Though wrath has so far seized on me as to proceed to sentence, yet wrath will not abide on me unless I abide in unbelief; there is some hopes if I could but believe. Thus the sensible sinner is helped up from sinking; hope keeps his head above the waves, or brings him up again when he is already overwhelmed and seems quite gone.

When he is even oppressed by the powers of darkness, and the dismal apprehensions of wrath and misery, the Lord opens some crevice, lets in some glimpse of hope. The discoveries of Christ in the gospel are as 'a door of hope opened to him in this valley of Achor,' Zech. ix. 11. Here is the state of a lost sinner represented by the state of the Jews captivated in Babylon: where you may see the misery of it, 'in a pit'; the helplessness of it, 'no water'; the hopes of it, though prisoners, yet 'prisoners of hope'; the grounds of those hopes, wholly out of themselves, in the blood of the covenant, and this stronghold.

Their misery, which sinners in the way to faith are sensible of, they are in a pit, a dark pit; the state of nature is a state of darkness, it is Satan's dungeon, not a spark of saving light; and therefore when brought out of it they are said to be 'turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God,' Acts xxvi. They are bound, fettered in this dungeon; and therefore the Dutch render it 'thy bounden ones;' they are laden with fetters, with that which is worse than fetters and iron, the bonds of iniquity. They are in no capacity of themselves to scramble out of this dismal condition; nay, the mouth of the pit is closed, the Lord has shut it up, and shut them up in it, Rom. xi. 32, *συνέχουσιν*. And as of themselves they cannot get out of it, so they cannot live in it, they have not so much as water to live upon; a pit wherein there is no water, no succour, no comfort, no refreshment, nothing to refresh or sustain their souls for a moment. He apprehends the misery of it, a pit wherein there is no succour, destitute of all remedy. So he now finds it, he must look out if he mean to live.

But as it is helpless, is it hopeless too? No; a sensible sinner, though a prisoner, yet a prisoner of hope, he hears there is a refuge, a stronghold for him; though he be now sunk into this pit, though there be no water to keep him alive in it, yet there is the blood of the covenant to bring him out of it. This is it which makes him a prisoner of hope; an eye of hope, in this forlorn state, upon this stronghold, upon this blood of the covenant, is one step out of the pit, one step towards faith.

8. Self-abbhorrence. This springs from the former. Hopes that he may find mercy with God, and probability that he may have pardon through Christ, fill him with indignation against sin, and himself for sin; makes him condemn himself and justify God, though he should proceed against him with the greatest severity. When the soul is cast down low, under dreadful apprehensions of wrath and misery, and then raised up, though but a little, to some hopes of deliverance, it makes a great impression upon the heart. And is there hopes for me, says the sinner, who have so much, so long, so highly offended God? for me, who have so shamefully abused mercy, so vilely contemned Christ? Is there hopes for me, who might have been now in hell, in a hopeless condition? for me, when so many less sinners than I are without hope? for me, who have done all I could to make my condition desperate? Can the Lord be inclinable to shew me mercy? Can Christ entertain any thoughts of peace concerning me? Is this possible? Is there hopes after all? Oh then what a wretch am I, that have so dishonoured such a God! that have so affronted, so wounded such a Saviour! Oh there is no hell too grievous for such a wretch as I am, no wrath too heavy for such a rebel as I have been, no vengeance too severe for such injuries, such sins as mine. How few are there in hell, who have more deserved hell than I! I am, I hear, in a way to mercy, in a way of hope, when so many better than I are in that place of torment, shut up in a despairing state for ever. And is it that God whom I have so provoked, so dishonoured, that has made this difference? Has all those millions of provocations been levelled against that God, against that God that gives me hopes of mercy? Oh what a monster am I! Oh how exceeding monstrous are my sins! Nothing in earth or hell so vile as I! No sins so abominable as these of mine! The provocations of devils and damned souls are not worse than mine. They sin not against a God that gives hopes, as I have done. The sinner thus affected, apprehends he cannot speak bad enough of himself and of his sins.

This makes him abhor himself, this makes him sick of sin. That which was before as a sweet morsel, it is now nauseous to his soul, it lies heavy on his stomach, he is sick of it, Mat. ix. 12. The sinner will not come to the physician, nor will the great physician undertake his cure, till he be, more or less, in some degree or other, thus sick of sin. This nauseating of sin, this loathing of it, and himself for it, is another step to faith.

9. Valuing of Christ. He has far other thoughts of Christ than heretofore. When he is brought so low in the sense of his own vileness, sinfulness, misery, impotency, and sees the excellency, the all-sufficiency of Christ discovered in the gospel, his thoughts of Christ are raised. He that heard before of the blood and righteousness, of the satisfaction and intercession, of the love and bounty of Christ, as common things, words of course, of which he had but common thoughts, he finds a strong, a strange alteration as to his apprehensions of the value, worth, and necessity of them. Discourses of Christ are not tedious now; he thinks he can never hear enough



of them ; they do not pass out as they come in ; they do not glide through his mind, without leaving any impression. He finds his thoughts of Christ raised by every word. He was before in a soul lethargy, as, alas ! the most are. Tell him of cure, he minds it not, he is insensible. Ay, but now he has such thoughts of Christ, as one tortured with the stone has of that which he hears may give him ease and cure. He prizes Christ, as one ready to die with thirst and heat would prize a well of waters, as Samson, Judges xv. 18, or Hagar. He prizes Christ now, as one in cruel, miserable bondage in Turkish slavery would prize a ransom. So does he value this *λύτρον*. He looks on Christ now, as one that has been long in a dark dungeon would look upon the light, if a beam of it should break in on a sudden upon him in that dismal place, Mal. iv. Suppose a man born blind should have his eyes opened on a sudden, and see the sun rising in its glory, what thoughts would he have of it ! Such thoughts has the sensible sinner now of Christ, when, his eyes being opened, he sees him revealed in the gospel.

He wonders at his former blindness and stupidity, that his apprehensions of Christ should be so low, when he has been so clearly revealed in the word. Where Christ is truly preferred before all things, there are the seeds of faith. But I suppose this high esteem of Christ is in order of nature, though not in order of time, before actual faith. For till Christ be thus valued, the sinner is not willing to accept of Christ on his own terms ; till he be the pearl of great price, he is not willing to sell all for him, to renounce all, that he may cleave only to Christ for pardon.

10. Strong desires after Christ. It is the goodness of a thing which makes it the object of our desires ; and the more excellent that goodness is apprehended to be, the more ardent are our desires. The more necessary it is apprehended, the more restless, and importunate, and insatiable are our desires, and the more easily will we yield to any terms upon which it may be obtained.

Now the discovery of the sinner's misery and impotency, makes him apprehend an absolute necessity of Christ. The discovery of Christ's all-sufficiency, as able to save and relieve him to the utmost, makes him apprehend a transcendent excellency in Christ. Hence his desires after Christ are ardent, importunate, such as make him ready to stoop to anything, so as he may have Christ.

His desires are ardent. He longs for Christ as Rachel for children, Gen. xxx. 1. Oh give me Christ, or else I die. Wrath will overwhelm me, justice will seize on me, hell will swallow me up ; there is no way but I must perish, without Christ. Give me Christ, or else I die.

His heart is carried after Christ, as David's was to that which he calls the law, the word, the testimony of God ; he longed, he breathed, he panted after them : Ps. cxix. 40, ' I have longed after,' &c. ; ver. 20, ' My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath,' &c. His heart was so far stretched out in longing desires, as it was ready to break. Now indeed that which he thus intensely desired was Christ, veiled under the expressions, law, &c., for we cannot by the law here understand the covenant of works (for what is to be desired in that ?) but life. Now life, upon the terms of that law or covenant, is become impossible ; and that which is impossible, is not desirable. The object of desire is a possible good. It is not the doctrine of the covenant of works. What then can it be, but the doctrine of the covenant of grace, since the whole doctrine of the Scripture is referred to one of these covenants ? That law, &c., which he longed for, was that

which is contained in the covenant of grace. And what is the sum of that but Christ? This is it which he longed for. And indeed Christ was as fully and sufficiently held forth in the Old Testament as in the New, though not so clearly and perspicuously. They had the gospel under that administration, which we call the law or Old Testament, sufficiently, though not so evidently as we. And therefore Paul, who preached the gospel as purely and fully as ever it was preached in the world, professeth that he preached nothing but what was contained in the law and the prophets, nothing in the New but what was in the Old Testament, Acts xxvi. 22.

David had the doctrine of the gospel of Christ, of salvation by Christ then. And this was it his heart was so drawn out after; and so he expresses it, Ps. cxix. 81, 174. The law wherein he delighted was the doctrine of salvation, and so the doctrine of Christ, in whom alone salvation is to be found; and Christ is called salvation, Luke ii. 28. That which Simeon saw David longed for; he longed for it ardently. And so does the sensible sinner long for Christ as for salvation, when he finds himself in such danger to be damned; longs for Christ as for life, when he sees death and hell before him, and no hopes of life without Christ.

This makes his desires importunate. Nothing else will satisfy him; he will not be put off with any else. If the Lord would offer him a world in this case, it would not satisfy. Alas, says he, what would a thousand worlds avail me, if, after a momentary enjoyment of them, I must go to hell for ever! What will these profit me, so long as the Lord's wrath burns against me! What will all the pleasures and riches of the world avail me, so long as I am but a condemned person, and in danger every hour to be led forth to execution! Oh no; let me have Christ, whatever I want. Let me have him who can procure a pardon for a condemned soul; let me have him who can make my peace with an incensed God; let me have him who can save me from the wrath to come. Oh Christ, or nothing. Alas! whatever else I have or the world can afford, they are woeful comforts, miserable comforts to a perishing soul. A Jesus, a Saviour for a lost soul; none but Christ.

Effectual desires. Such as make them stoop to any terms, submit to any conditions, so he may have Christ. He will not now capitulate with Christ; but so as he may have himself, he may make his own terms. He is ready to do anything, to suffer anything, to part with anything, so he may gain Christ. So it was with the apostle, Philip. iii.; those things which were gain to him, of which he thought to make the greatest advantage, he would part with them as loss, as freely as a man would part with that which he were like to lose by, as that which is like to undo him. And those things which he counted his glory before, he would part with them as *σκύβαλα*, as dung, as freely as one would cast dung out of his lodging. And why? That he might gain Christ; that he might be found in him. Ask the soul now (who was resolved before to keep such and such a sin, notwithstanding all that Christ could do or say in the ministry of the gospel), Wilt thou part with such a lust, that which has been so gainful, brought in such a revenue of pleasure, profit, or applause? Oh, says he, it is loss now; it would undo me if I should not quit it; I should lose Christ, I should lose my soul, if I live in it; I'll part with it as freely as I would part with a mortal disease, as with that which would ruin me.

He desires Christ, as Esau longed for meat when he was ready to faint and die for hunger; if Jacob would but give him meat, he might make his own terms for it, Gen. xxv. 80-82: 'Sell me thy birthright,' says he.

Here was hard terms ; for the birthright concerned the office of the priesthood, a pre-eminence over the brethren, and a double portion of the father's estate. But though this might seem hard, yet Esau's necessity is so great, his appetite so strong, that he sticks not at it, ver. 32. So the sinner hears what he must part with, if he will have Christ ; and when Satan or his corrupt heart would persuade him it is a hard bargain, yet he finds his extremity so great, death so near him, he will not stand on it. Behold, I am at the point to die ; there is but a step between me and eternal death ; my soul is ready to drop into hell ; and what will these riches, these pleasures, these lusts do to me ? I shall die, if I had ten thousand times more of the best of these, if I have not the bread of life, if I have not Christ. And therefore he resolves as firmly as if he were tied by Jacob's oath, that he will quit all, if he may but have life, if Christ will be life to him. He longs for Christ, as Shechem did for Dinah, Gen. xxiv. 8. He would give anything, if he might but obtain his desires, ver. 11, 12. Oh but they stand not upon dowry ; they propound terms of another nature, ver. 15. He and his people must be circumcised, if he meant to have Dinah ; and to be circumcised was painful, it was perilous too, and it is like at that time reproachful to the heathen. But yet so was his heart drawn out after her, as even these hard terms pleased him, ver. 18, 19. It pleased him so as, how grievous soever it might seem, he deferred not to do it.

Thus it is with a sinner in this case ; he is so taken with Christ, he does so long for him, that if the match may be but made up, whatever terms Christ will propound shall please him, even the reproach of Christ, even dangers and sufferings for Christ shall please him, so he may but enjoy him. Whatever stands in the way shall be cut off, though it be as dear to him as his own flesh, as a right hand or right eye. Even his heart shall be circumcised, since Christ would have it so ; how painful soever it seem, yet it does please him, he will not defer to do it, so as Christ may be given him.

And when it is come to this, the seeds of faith (which are in the heart when Christ is so highly valued, as I shewed in the former head) begin to sprout forth. Such an ardent, importunate, effectual desire after Christ is a sprig of faith ; but yet he is not come to cast himself on Christ, to that actual dependence on him, whereby the Holy Ghost seems most frequently to represent faith unto us, one step further he must go before he come to this.

11. A persuasion that the Lord would have them to believe that Christ is willing they should rest on him for pardon and life. Not only that he will receive those that come to him, but that he is willing they should come ; not only that he will not fail those who rely on him, but that he is willing they should rely on him. He convinces the sensible sinner not only of the necessity of faith, that unless he believe, there is nothing for him but wrath and condemnation, no way but this to avoid hell and eternal death. Not only of the excellency of faith, and of the certain advantage which may be got by believing, that if he could believe, the storm would be over, justice would be satisfied, wrath would be appeased, pardon, and reconciliation, and life would be his portion, but also that it is a duty, yea, his duty to believe, and to believe now. Many times the sensible sinner sticks at this, he finds a difficulty here not easily mastered. Though he be satisfied it is a duty to some to rest on Christ, and apply the promise, those who are deeply humbled, and fitly qualified, yet he questions whether it be *his* duty, at least whether it be *yet* his duty. He doubts whether Christ's

invitations and commands be directed to him for this purpose. He eyes not the authority of Christ so much as his mercy in such injunctions, and doubts that he is not yet a fit subject for such mercy. He looks upon believing as a privilege rather than a duty, a privilege that he is altogether unfit for, unworthy of. He is not yet sufficiently prepared, not humbled enough; he is too sinful, too unworthy, to have anything to do with Christ and the promise. It may be a duty to others, but it would be presumption in him to lay hold on Christ in the promise. That is bread for children, he cannot presume that a crumb of it belongs to him. Will the Lord invite such a woeful prodigal as I have been to return to his house? May such a rebel as I have been have access to the King of glory? Will the golden sceptre be holden out to me? Does Christ stretch out his arms to such a sinful piece of deformity? May I come into his embraces? Oh, it is no easy matter to persuade a humbled soul of this. But yet he waits upon the Lord in the use of appointed means, and in the use of them the Lord lifts him above this difficulty, and satisfies his doubts, removes his scruples, persuades him that it is his will, even that he should believe. And indeed, as faith of assurance comes ordinarily by the application in particular of a promise, so the soul comes not ordinarily to this faith of dependence but by the particular application of Christ's commands and invitations, till he be persuaded that the general command to believe concerns him, and is, as it were, directed to him in particular.

When he hears these gracious invitations, 'Come unto me, all ye,' &c., 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come,' &c., and 'let whosoever will, come,' Why, says he, it seems Christ would have me come to him; I am the person, how unworthy soever, whom he invites, importunes, beseeches. When he hears the command, 1 John iii. 23, he takes it to himself, as though he were named in it: It is the will and pleasure of Christ that I should believe; he directs his command unto, and lays it to me. When he hears that to believe is to give glory to God, Rom. iv. 20, Why, says he, though I have so much dishonoured Christ, he will count himself glorified by my believing in him. When he hears that he that believes not makes God a liar, 1 John v. 10, If I should not believe, says he, I should cast this dishonour on him; my keeping off from Christ puts this affront on him; either I must believe him or give him the lie. Oh, I have dishonoured, affronted him too much already, shall I add this to all the rest?

12. He resolves to comply with the Lord's invitation, to obey his command, and so casts himself upon Christ, cleaves to him, rests on him, embraces him, and holds him fast.

Though I be the unworthiest sinner that ever had access to Christ, yet since he delights to glorify the freeness and riches of his grace in admitting those that are most unworthy, and since he expresses it by inviting me, shall I not hearken to him? shall not I comply with his gracious invitations?

Though I be unworthy to come, yet is not he worthy to be obeyed? I am cast away for ever if I cast not myself on Christ; and now he stretches out his arms to receive me, what can I desire more? I perish if I come not; and now when he invites me to come, shall I refuse? shall I defer? shall I destroy myself and dishonour him both at once, by forbearing to do what he commands me, when I am damned if I do it not?

The invitation of Christ encourages him, but his own extremity forces him to roll himself on Christ; it forces him, &c.

It is with the sinner in this case as it was with those four lepers, 2 Kings vii. 3, 4. Thus says the sensible sinner within himself, Why stay I in this state of unbelief till I die? What course soever offer itself, there is but one way to escape death, and that is by running to Christ. If I say, I will enter into the city, if I return back to my former evil ways, whether of profaneness or formality, the wrath of God beleaguers that state, a famine is there, no relief can come into it, my soul will certainly perish there; but if I sit still here in the state where I am, without venturing on Christ, why, here I shall surely die, I am every moment in danger of eternal death. Now therefore, come, let me fall into the hands of Christ; if he save me alive, I shall live, and if he kill me, I shall but die. There is hopes I may live by coming to him, but if I go not, there is nothing but certain death. Nay, the humbled soul has more encouragement here than the lepers. There is not only provisions for life enough in Christ's all-sufficiency, he has his invitation to come to him for life; nay, he has his promise, that if he will come, he shall live.

Upon this, the soul resolves, and ventures, renouncing all other ways and supports, resolving to submit to Christ's terms, whatever they be; he casts his perishing soul into the arms of Christ, and there he rests.

Now, when the Lord has brought the sinner thus far, he is actually arrived at that faith which is saving and justifying. I have explained this act at large before. I need add no more, only a brief account of some of the consequences of this act.

13. The Lord discovers his faith to him, possesses him with an apprehension that he does truly believe. The former is the direct act of faith, this is a reflex act; when he has acted faith, to know that it is faith which he acts.

And sometimes it is a good while before the believer knows that he believes indeed. As a man fallen into the water, in danger of being drowned, yet drawn out to land with much ado, through the fear and amazement that is on him, though he be safe, yet for a while knows not where he is, &c. As it is the power of the Spirit that works faith, so it is the light of the Spirit that discovers faith when it is wrought, 1 Cor. ii. 12.

14. This makes way for assurance, that assurance which we call discursive; wherein the Spirit of God witnesses together with the spirit of a convert, that he is a believer; by consequence brings him in this testimony, that he has everlasting life. He that believes has everlasting life; but I believe, *ergo*, I have, &c.

There is another kind of assurance, from an immediate testimony of the Spirit, without such an application of Scripture grounds.

But whether this assurance be intuitive or discursive, if it be an act of faith, it is not the justifying act; indeed, it seems rather an effect than an act of that faith, and that which follows after it, and sometimes at a great distance, Eph. i.

15. From this assurance proceeds sometimes peace, sometimes comfort, sometimes a joy, triumph, and glorying in God. Peace, freedom from fears and terrors; comfort, a degree above peace; joy, which is comfort in its exaltation; peace, which is the hushing of the storm; comfort, which is as the breaking out of the sun; triumph, joy, which is as the sun shining in its full strength, Rom. v. 1-8.

Use 1. Information. See here the misery of unbelievers. Here is a dreadful representation of this in these words, we need go no further. Here is the handwriting of God in the text, as terrible to unbelievers as

that handwriting on the wall was to Belshazzar, Dan. v. 5, 6. Methinks the countenance of every unbeliever, that sees or hears these words, should be changed. 'He that believes not shall not see,' &c. Particularly here is misery negative: 'He shall not see life;' positive, 'the wrath of God,' &c. We have here an epitome of hell as the portion of an unbeliever. The miseries of hell are no more than *pæna damni*, and *pæna sensus*, and both these are entailed upon unbelievers: 'He shall not see life;' here is the pain of loss; the pain of sense: 'The wrath of God abides on him.' An unbeliever is so far in hell upon earth as hell can be upon earth. He is without life; he is dead spiritually; he has not the least degree of spiritual life, no breathing, no motion truly vital and spiritual; he is dead legally; the law has passed sentence of death on him, he 'is condemned already,' ver. 18, and the sentence is so far executed, as that the wrath of God does now actually abide. He is without God, the author of life; without Christ, the purchaser of life; without the covenant, the promise of life, and without hopes of heaven, the seat of everlasting life; without grace, the beginnings of life; without hopes of this; so far he is from it, that it is out of sight; nor shall he ever see it, or hopes of it, till he believe. Distinctly,

(1.) He is without Christ, the fountain of life. It is faith by which the soul is contracted to Christ. An unbeliever is a stranger, an enemy to Christ, whatever friendship he pretend. And so is Christ a stranger, an enemy to him. It is faith by which the soul is united to Christ. An unbeliever is as far from Christ as earth is from heaven; you may as well mingle and join heaven and earth together as join an unbeliever to Christ, Eph. ii. 12.

It is faith by which Christ dwells in the heart, Eph. iii. 17. Christ dwells in the heart by faith. Satan dwells in the heart by unbelief. The heart of an unbeliever is the place where Satan has his throne. The heart of a believer is the habitation of Christ. The heart of an unbeliever is the habitation of the devil, Rev. viii. 2. Christ has possession of a believing soul, but the soul of an unbeliever is possessed by the devil. The strong man armed keeps that house, there he dwells, there he rules, Eph. ii. 2, *ὁ ἰσχυρὸς ἄρabisas*, the children of unbelief, so rendered, Rom. xi. 32. He rules there, not only in hell, but on earth; not only then, but now, *νῦν ἐνεργῶντος*, now, and will do for ever, till Christ come by faith to put him out of possession.

An unbeliever has nothing to do with the person of Christ; that I have shewed; nor has he any rights to the purchase or benefits of Christ. Instance in two, which comprise the rest: the blood of Christ, or the righteousness performed on earth; the intercession of Christ, continued in heaven.

An unbeliever has nothing to do with the *righteousness* of Christ; for this is the righteousness of faith, Rom. iii. 22. Nor with the *intercession* of Christ, John xvii. 9, 20.

Now, being without Christ, it follows necessarily they are without life, 1 John v. 11, 12. And who is he that has the Son? Ver. 10, he that believeth.

(2.) He is without the covenant, the evidence of life. An unbeliever is not at all specified in the covenant of grace; it no more belongs to him than the writings, the evidences of another man's lands belong to you, who were never thought of, never mentioned in the drawing of them up. Believing is our first entering into covenant with God; how can he that never entered into covenant be in it?

Unbelievers are strangers to the covenant, Eph. ii. 12. The covenant of grace is called the law of faith, Rom. iii. 27, as the covenant of works is called there the law of works.

Now as Adam, not performing perfect obedience, which was the condition of the covenant of works, could have no benefit by that covenant, no more can he who believes not have any benefit by the covenant of grace.

Unbelievers are not in covenant with Christ; their league is with hell, their covenant is with death. Christ looks on them as confederates with Satan, that cursed league is inconsistent with any confederacy with Christ, and that league is never dissolved till ye believe. Your pretended renouncing of sin and Satan is but a deluding of your souls, a mocking of Christ; you never break your league with Satan, never enter into covenant with Christ till ye believe.

An unbeliever has nothing to do with the promises; for the promises are but as so many articles of the covenant, and so it is called a covenant of promise, Eph. ii. Now what has he to do with the articles of a covenant that never entered into it? Rom. iv. 13. The promise is through the righteousness of faith; and, ver. 16, it is of faith. It is of faith that we have a right to any promise. The promises of life and pardon are all to faith: 'If thou believest in the Lord Jesus, thou shalt be saved;' 'He that believes has everlasting life.' The promises are a sealed fountain to an unbeliever, it is open to nothing but faith. It is children's bread, and we are the children of God through faith. An unbeliever has neither a hand, nor a mouth, either to gather or to eat any crumb of this manna.

And as nothing to do with the covenant, so neither with the seals of it. What right has he to the seals of your writings or evidences, who has nothing to do with the writings and evidences themselves? The covenant is evidence for heaven, under the hand and seal of God; a deed of gift under the seal of heaven. How does the seal belong to him, who has nothing to do with the deed?

Indeed, the seals of the covenant are, as Augustine, *verbum visibile, visibilis promissio*, visible promises. Now he that has no right to the audible promise, that which offers pardon and life to the ear, has no right to the visible promise, which offers pardon and life to the eye, since the very same thing is tendered in both. As we must not apply the audible promise to an unbeliever, so must we not apply the visible promise; there is the very same reason for both. The promise belongs to believers and their seed, both visible and audible promises, for they should never be separated. Neither of them belongs to unbelievers, nor their seed, for they are not the heirs of promise. And to make over the inheritance, or the seals and evidences of it to them, would be to give the heir's inheritance, in its sealed evidences, to pretenders and intruders, to those to whom Christ in his will and testament never bequeathed it,—an injustice that we should use all our care to avoid. While a man is visibly in unbelief nothing can be sealed to him but condemnation, because he has no evidence for anything else. So the seal is either set to this, or nothing.

(3.) Without grace, the beginning of life. He that is an unbeliever, whatever fine show he make in the flesh, whatever he pretend, profess, or practise, how specious soever his deportment be, whatever outward conformity he shew, either to the rules of law or gospel, he is a graceless person. How finely soever the sepulchre is painted and beautified without, if faith be not within, there is nothing but dead bones and rottenness; nothing but what is as loathsome in the eye of God, as the rottenness of a

dead carcase is to us. For it is faith that purifies the heart, Acts xv. 9. Till the heart be purified by faith, nothing is pure, either within or without, Titus i. 15. There is not the least degree of holiness or sanctification, till faith; it is that by which we are sanctified, Acts xxvi. 18. Faith is a root-grace; there is not, there cannot be, a spring of holiness, till faith be fastened in the heart.

No degree of spiritual life without faith: Gal. ii. 20, 'The life that I live is by faith in the Son of God;' by faith uniting Christ to the soul as the principle. Till then the soul is dead, even as the body is dead when not in conjunction with the soul. This is his state, he is dead in sins and trespasses, and so are his actings; all his works are dead works, till there be faith in Christ, as appears by that connection, 'repentance from dead works.' And,

(4.) He has no title to heaven, which is everlasting life. No title; for how should he come by it? The Lord never ordained heaven for unbelievers; 'he has chosen the poor, rich in faith.' He has prepared hell for unbelievers, Rev. xxi. 8. Christ never purchased that for them. He is 'become the author of eternal salvation to those (only) who believe.' Those that contend most for the extent of Christ's death, will never say that the blood of Christ ever brought any unbeliever, so persevering, into heaven. He was given, and gave himself only for this end.

He was never promised to them. Nay, all the threatenings, in law or gospel, are the portion of unbelievers. Take one for all, and that from the mouth of Christ, who speaks mercy and life when there is any to be had; and they are part of the last words he spoke in this world, Mark xvi. 16.

They have no right by adoption. They were never adopted. Unbelievers are not the sons of God, but the children of the devil. No sonship but by faith, Gal. iii. 26; those that are not so by faith, are not so at all; for all that are sons, are so by faith.

(5.) They are far from life; so far, as they never come in sight of it, never see life. And if they can never come in sight of it, what hopes can they have to enjoy it? Hope of heaven without faith, is a castle in the air, a structure without a foundation. Alas! how can they hope to enjoy it, whom the Lord calls off from all hopes ever to see it! While ye are without faith, ye are without hopes, in that forlorn condition of the Ephesians, before they believed, Eph. ii. 12.

(6.) All this is certain, as sure as the Lord is true. For it is he that speaks it, and he speaks it peremptorily. He does not say, possibly he may never see life; or probably he may never see life; but he *shall* never see it. As sure as the Lord will not lie, as sure as he is able to make good that word, so sure is this, he that believes not shall not see life.

This is the sentence of the gospel. If it had been a sentence of the law, that is not so peremptory, that admits of an exception, the gospel may relieve one against the sentence of the law. Ay, but this is the sentence of the gospel, the final decision of this case, which admits of no exception, against which there is no relief, neither here nor hereafter, the last declaration of God's will concerning a sinner, that if he believes not he shall certainly die, and that without any further hopes of mercy or remedy; he shall never see life.

Here is the negative misery of an unbeliever. Oh that this might stir you up to search your hearts, to examine seriously, as becomes you in a business of such consequence, &c.

Come we to his misery expressed positively. 'The wrath of God abides



on him.' Every word is dreadful, and big with terror. It is *wrath*, and the *wrath of God*, and the *wrath of God on him*, and the *wrath of God abiding on him*.

(1.) *Wrath*. It is not anger or displeasure only, though that be dreadful; but *wrath*, sublimated anger, anger blown up into a terrible flame. This is it which kindles upon unbelievers, a consuming fire, the furnace made seven times hotter. This is the portion of unbelievers, their lines fall in this place; they are children of *wrath*, and this is their heritage. There is no quitting of this woeful relation, but only by faith. 'Who can stand before thee when thou art angry?' Is there no abiding of it then? Who then can stand before it, when it flames forth into *wrath*? Isa. xxxiii. 14, 'Who can dwell,' &c.

(2.) It is the *wrath of God*. It is not the *wrath of a king*, though that be as the roaring of a lion, at which all the beasts of the field do tremble; it is not the *wrath of all the kings of the earth*; it is not the *wrath of all the men on the earth*, or all the angels in heaven put together. What then? It is a *wrath infinitely more dreadful*; it is the *wrath of that God*, in comparison of whom all the men on earth, all the angels in heaven, all the creatures on earth, are as nothing. All their *wrath* put together is as nothing compared with the *wrath of God*. Theirs would but be as the breath of one's nostrils; whereas the *wrath of God* is as a whirlwind, such a one as rends the rocks, and tears up the mountains, and shakes the foundations of the earth, and shrivels up the heavens like a scroll, and causes the whole fabric of heaven and earth to stagger like a drunken man. Oh, 'who knows the power of his *wrath*!' Their *wrath* is but like a spark; his *wrath* is like a river, a sea of kindled brimstone, Isa. xxx. 33. This *wrath*, this *wrath of God* will be thy portion, if thou believe not.

(3.) It is the *wrath of God on him*. He says not, it is near him, or coming towards him, but it is on him. Not that all the *wrath of God* is on him already, for there are vials of *wrath* that will never be emptied, never emptier, though the Lord be pouring them forth to all eternity. It is compared to a river, and that is continually running; and when it has run some hundred years, there is as much to come as if there were none run by already; it will run on thee to eternity, unless by believing thou stop it, divert the course of it in time.

But it is all on him as to the sentence. He is adjudged to all the *wrath of God* already, and execution is beginning, though the beginning be small in comparison of what it will proceed to hereafter. The first fruits of *wrath* are reaped now, but a full harvest is coming; and the longer thou continuest in unbelief, the riper thou art for that dreadful harvest. All that thou hast from God now, thou hast it in *wrath*; for as all the ways of God are mercy to the believer, so all his ways are *wrath* to the unbeliever. The execution is begun now, and the Lord is ready, if thou prevent it not, for a farther, a full execution. He does 'whet his sword,' Ps. vii. 12, 13. If you continue in unbelief, you are likely to be the butts of the Lord's indignation; his arm, his sword will fall upon you.

(4.) It is *abiding wrath*. If this *wrath* were but for a moment, it were more tolerable, but it is *abiding wrath*; it is not on and off, but always on him without intermission; and there, unless he believe, it will abide for ever, wherever he is, whatever he does, wherever he goes. The curse and the *wrath of God* are in effect the same thing; and what the Lord denounces against the Israelites concerning the curse, holds true against unbelievers as to this *wrath of God*: Dent. xxviii. 16, 17, 'The *wrath of God* is on

him in the city,' &c. The wrath of God is on him in every place, in every state, in every enjoyment, in every undertaking.

This is the woful, the miserable condition of every unbeliever.

*Quest.* But who are unbelievers? Are there any amongst us in this dreadful case?

*Ans.* 1. He that has no other faith than a bare assent to the truths of the gospel, a belief that all that is declared concerning Christ is true, all that is delivered in the Scripture is the truth; he that has no other faith than this is an unbeliever, for the devils have as much as this comes to, James ii. 19. If he go no further, he shall no more see life than they.

*Ans.* 2. He that goes on in any known sin of omission or commission; whether it be an acting of what God forbids, uncleanness, intemperance, profaning of God's name or day or ordinances, worldliness, idleness, injustice, covetousness; or neglect of what God requires, neglect of hearing the word, prayer, meditation, self-examination, &c.

When you hear this or that condemned as a sin in the word, and yet will continue in it, here is enough to evidence you are unbelievers. The apostle speaks of 'the obedience of faith;' they are inseparable, children of disobedience who are children of unbelief; the apostle uses one word for both, Eph. ii. 2; Rom. xi. 32. 'Faith purifies the heart,' Acts xv. 9; when that is purified the conversation will be purified; where it is not, there is no faith. If you go on, allow yourselves in any unlawful thing, this is your portion.

*Ans.* 3. He that finds not an universal change in himself. He who finds he did love any sin, and does not now hate it, did delight in it, or make light of it, and does not now bewail it, count it his burden and affliction; he that did scorn purity, or at least slight holiness, and is not now in love with it, that durst once venture on sin, and does not now fear it; he that has had low thoughts of Christ, and does not now highly value him, so as to part with all for him, so as to prefer him before his chief joy; he that did neglect Christ, and does not now hunger and thirst after him; he that did immoderately follow the world, and does not now condemn it; he that did gratify the flesh, and does not now strive to crucify it; he that did count the word and prayer a burden, and does not now count them his delight; that has been careless, heartless in holy duties; and does not now stir up his soul, and strive with his heart to get it raised to God in them,—he that does not find such a change is an unbeliever; for when the Lord works faith, he works such a change.

If this be thy case, all the dreadful things are thy portion. Apply them as you love your souls, put not off conviction; for you are never like to come to faith till convinced of unbelief.

*Use* 2. Exhortation. This should excite sinners to mind this duty, as that which is of greatest concernment. This I shall direct to sinners that are secure: these should never be at rest till they find their hearts willing to accept of Christ upon his own terms; sensible sinners, those who are willing thus to close with Christ, should never rest till they be brought to depend on Christ, to rest themselves on him for pardon and life. Here are two sorts of sinners, and two acts of faith. I think this distinction necessary, the conditions of these persons being so different, they must be led to a different act of faith; for a secure sinner, not yet sensible of his sin and misery, not yet willing to leave all for Christ, not yet resolved to come under the government of Christ, &c., for such a one to depend on Christ for pardon and life, is not believing, but presumption. He must first be brought

to this, to be willing to accept of Christ as he is offered ; till then he has no ground to expect pardon and life from Christ ; till then he has no encouragement to rely on Christ for it ; till then we cannot press it on him as his duty.

But for the sensible sinner, who is already brought thus far, who is burdened with his sin, abhors himself for it, who prefers Christ before all, who has such ardent, importunate, effectual desires after Christ (as I explained to you), it is his next duty to cast himself on Christ for life and salvation. This is that the gospel calls him to, to which, in this use, I shall encourage him, propounding some motives, removing impediments, answering objections, and giving some directions distinctly, in reference to these different states, as the case shall require.

For motives I shall go no further than the text. Here is the weightiest duty propounded, with the weightiest motive in the world : believing the duty ; everlasting life the motive. Every word contains the strongest attractive. Here is *life* for him that will believe ; here is *everlasting* life, and here is this *at present*, 'hath everlasting life.' 'He that believes hath everlasting life.'

1. Here is life for him that believes. And what more sweet, more necessary, more desirable, than life, especially to him who is in apparent danger of death ! A man that is sentenced to death, that is condemned already, that is every moment in expectation to be led to execution, what would not he do that he might have life ? Why this is the condition of every man by nature, not one in the world excepted ; he is a child of wrath, a son of death ; the great Judge of the heaven and earth has passed the sentence of death on him. It stands on record in his righteous law ; you may find it everywhere in the Scripture. The mouth of the Lord does there pronounce it, Thou art condemned already, ver. 18 ; every moment in danger of eternal death. And in this condition thou remainest, till that almighty power, that raised Jesus Christ from the dead, work this great, this difficult work, which is beyond the power of men or angels, faith in thee. Now if there be any sense of thy condition, if sin and Satan have not quite stupified thee, wilt thou not cry out for life ? Is not life desirable ? Why, there is no way but one to save thy life. This is the only way, and this is a sure way. Believe, and thou shalt have life ; otherwise thou art a dead man. All the world cannot save thy life : no way but this. Unless thou believe, thou art never like to see life, never like to feel any thing but the wrath of God.

2. Here is everlasting life to him that believes. A condemned man would be glad of a reprieve ; he would do much for that. Ay, but here is not only a reprieve, but a pardon, if thou believest. Here is not only a respite of the execution, but a revoking, a nulling of the sentence of death. Here is not only a reprieve, not only a pardon for a malefactor, a rebel ; but the highest advancement and preferment. A son of death becomes an heir of life and glory ; 'heirs of God, and co-heirs with Christ.' He is not only brought from his dungeon and fetters unto light and liberty, but brought to a crown, to a kingdom ; not only raised from the dunghill, but set amongst princes, those that are heirs apparent of the crown of life and glory ; a kingdom that cannot be shaken, a crown that fadeth not away, that which he shall enjoy, that which he shall wear for ever, everlasting life.

Oh what a motive is this ! Everlasting life is a big, pregnant word. There is more in it than the whole world will hold. There is more in it

than in all the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them put together. There is all in it that the eternal decree of love does grasp. There is all in it that the precious blood of Christ could purchase; that sum, that price, in comparison of which (so rich, so valuable is it), that all the treasures of the earth amount not to a mite. There is all in it that the covenant of grace and the everlasting gospel can hold. There is more in it than tongue can express, than heart can imagine, than angels can comprehend. All this is in it; and all this will be thine, if thou believest: nay, all this is thine.

8. Here is everlasting life at present for him that believes. 'He that believes,' *ἔχει*. He does not say he *may* have it, as though it were only possible or probable; he does not say he *shall* have it, as though it were merely future; but he *hath* it, it is his own at present. Whatever is comprised in this pregnant word, he hath right to it all at present, and he hath something of it in possession; and he is as sure of the rest as if he now had it, and as if he were actually possessed of it. And here I shall come to open this more fully.

(1.) He hath it in the decree of God. The Lord purposed from eternity to bring his chosen to everlasting life by faith. Faith is an effect of that eternal purpose, such an effect as is an evident and infallible sign of its cause; a certain evidence of those that are comprised in that purpose of love, an infallible character of an elect soul, and therefore called 'the faith of God's elect,' Titus i. 1.

The purpose of God is secret: it runs under ground till faith, and then it breaks forth, then this secret comes to light when the soul believes. Faith is the first saving appearance of it: he that believes may conclude that he is elected to life. He has eternal life by an unchangeable decree, a purpose as unchangeable as God himself, that can no more be changed than that God who is 'without variableness or shadow of changing.'

Upon this account the apostle speaks of those that believe, as having already obtained the inheritance of life, Eph. i. 11, 12, he speaks of himself and others then on earth as having obtained. And how had they obtained it? he adds, being predestinated; and who are these that had obtained it by this purpose? Why, those that trust in Christ. Believe then, and that great question, *Am I elected?* will be no more a question, there need be no more doubt of it. Believe, and you have everlasting life by the decree of heaven.

(2.) He hath it by the purchase of Christ. It is bought for a believer; it is bought and paid for; and what is more his own than that which is so purchased for him? Everlasting life is a purchased possession, Eph. i. 14. The purchaser is Christ; the price was his blood; a price of such value as did fully satisfy him of whom the purchase was made. But for whom did he purchase it? Why for all those, and only those, that believe. Christ had no need to purchase any thing for himself, he wanted nothing; he purchased for others; and who are they? ver. 16. Believe then, and eternal life is as much thine as that which is bought and paid for in thy name, and for thy use. The Lord is engaged, not only in point of mercy and favour, but as he is just and righteous, to let thee have it, it was purchased for thee.

(8.) He hath it by the sentence of the gospel. As an unbeliever has the sentence of death passed against him by the law, so a believer has the sentence of life passed for him by the gospel; both in chap. iii. the former, ver.

18, the latter in the text; so John i. 5; and this latter supersedes the former. If a man who has received sentence of death from the law, can appeal to the gospel, and there plead that he believes, the gospel will quit him, and declare him an heir of life, by virtue of the sentence of God himself, pronounced and recorded in the gospel. The sentence of death is of force no longer than the sinner continues in unbelief. As soon as he believes, from that time forth he hath everlasting life. If any question his right to it, he has the verdict of the gospel, the sentence and judgment of the Lord of life; that is sufficient to decide all controversy, and put it out of question that he has everlasting life.

(4.) He hath it in title. He is born to it, 1 Pet. i. 8-5. Those who are kept through faith unto salvation, are begotten again to an inheritance incorruptible.

Faith is one of the first acts of a new-born soul, a sure evidence that he is born again, that he is born of God; and he that is born of God is a child of God, and all his children are heirs, Rom. viii. 16, 17. Believe, and you are sons of God, and then this is your portion. Everlasting life is as much yours as the portion bequeathed to you by your father. Believe, then you are heirs, and this is your inheritance; you have this life as your patrimony.

(5.) He hath it by covenant. The covenant of grace is a covenant of life; the Lord therein engages to give everlasting life to those that enter into covenant with him. Now faith is our first entrance into covenant with God. When the soul consents to accept of Christ upon his own terms, the match is made up. The day of believing is the day of espousals; Christ becomes his husband, and everlasting life is his dowry, it is made sure to him. Now a dowry is appointed and made sure to a woman; though she have not the full possession and disposal of it while her husband lives, yet none will deny but she has a jointure. So, though a believer have not the full possession of heaven now, yet there is no reason to deny but he hath eternal life; for it is a dowry made sure to every one that believes, 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23. A believer has the word of Christ for it, his promise, Rom. iv. 16. He has it under the hand of Christ, a written evidence, John xx. 31. He has it under the seal of Christ, sealed evidence, Rom. iv. 11. He has it under the oath of God, Isaiah liv. 9, 10, Heb. vi. 17, 18.

(6.) He hath it in possession in some respect. He has possession of it in his head. Believe, and you are united unto Christ; united to him as really, as intimately, as inseparably, as head and members are united. Christ and believers make but one body. The union is so near, as both head and members have one name; both are called Christ, 1 Cor. xii. 12. The Lord Jesus and believers make but one Christ. Now, Christ is in possession of everlasting life; and therefore they are, because Christ and they are but one. The best, the principal part of a believer, his head, is in possession, and therefore he is said to be in possession. Hence it is that believers, as though they were in heaven already, are said to sit in heavenly places, even while they are on earth, Eph. ii. 6. Christ and believers being so much one, what is ascribed to Christ is ascribed to them; what is suffered, done, enjoyed by him, is said to be done, suffered, enjoyed by them. Because Christ was crucified, they are said to be crucified, Gal. ii. 20. Because Christ is risen, therefore they are said to be risen, Gal. iii. 1. Because Christ is set at his right hand in heavenly places, Eph. i. 3, and set down together there, Eph. ii. 6. But how can this be?

They are still on earth. Why, it is true in respect of Christ, it is in Christ Jesus; he is their head, and he is in possession, and therefore the best part of them is in possession already. Christ is their husband; he is gone before to take possession of heaven in their name, on their behalf: 'I go to prepare,' &c. And what is in the husband's possession belongs to the wife. Believe but this, and thou art in some respect in heaven already.

(7.) He has the beginning of everlasting life now. That life which will last for ever, is begun as soon as ye believe, Eph. i. 13, 14. They have the earnest of this inheritance as soon as they believe; and it is such an earnest as does not only make sure the bargain, the contract, but is part of payment, part of the purchase. That light which they have now from the Spirit of truth, is the same in kind, though not in degree, with that which they shall have in that inheritance. That joy which they have now from the Comforter, is the same in kind, though not in degree, with the joys of heaven, John xiv. 16. That glory which they have now from the Spirit of glory resting in them, is part of that which heaven affords, though short in degree, 1 Pet. iv. 14. That holiness which they have now from the Spirit of holiness, is the same in kind, though in less degree than in heaven, John iv. 14. The same water of life that overflows in heaven, is springing on earth in the heart of a believer. It springs not so fast now, nor does it rise so high; but it is the same well, and it is in him now, and all the powers of darkness cannot hinder it from springing up to everlasting life. He has everlasting life now as in a well, there he shall have it as in a river.

(8.) He has everlasting life for his use and advantage upon all occasions. He is not only a proprietor, and in part a possessor of it, as appears before, but an usufructuary. He may make use of heaven for whatever he needs, and whenever he has occasion.

He may have access to the throne of grace, the best place in heaven, whenever he will. Faith sets open the door; he may come with boldness and confidence, Eph. iii. 12, Heb. iv. 16. And coming in faith, he may come with full assurance that he shall have whatever he asks, 1 John v. 13, 14.

(9.) All this is sure. He is sure of all that is present. He is sure of all that is not yet in possession; as sure of it as if he had it already. This the expression imports, *he hath*. He is as sure of heaven as if he were in heaven. Nay, he is surer of heaven than his mere being in heaven could make him; for the fallen angels had a being once in heaven; but that was no assurance of everlasting life to them there; the event proves that a believer on earth is more sure of everlasting life in heaven, than those angels were when they were actually in heaven. But how come they to be thus sure? Why, it is partly through faith, 1 Pet. i. 4, 5. Through faith. Oh, but may not their faith fail? No, so long as Christ has any interest in heaven, so long as he has any power to prevail with his Father, who will easily be prevailed with for those whom he eternally loves. Now he has prayed to this purpose, Luke xxii. 32. But was not this peculiar to Peter, wherein others share not? No; for he adds, Strengthen thy brethren. When thou findest the benefit of this prayer, securing thy faith, strengthen thy brethren with this encouragement. Now what encouragement had this been to them, if Christ did not pray for them as well as him? John xvii. 20.

2. Impediments that hinder men from believing, that keep them short

of saving faith. These must be discovered, and removed. I shall endeavour both together.

The impediments are many. Satan uses his utmost craft and power to multiply and enforce them. I shall insist on some, that I apprehend to be the principal, most common, and most dangerous.

(1.) A conceit they have faith already, when really they have it not. This is Satan's great engine, whereby he destroys heaps upon heaps (as it is said of Samson), ruins multitudes of those that live under the gospel. When the light of it discovers the necessity of faith so clearly as there can be no gainsaying, he comes up with his reserve to secure the hold, and make good the ground that he has in a sinner, when his forlorn of atheism is routed. What, says he, though there be no salvation, no life, without faith, yet trouble not thyself, thou hast faith already. Hereby he keeps off conviction, renders the word ineffectual, hardens the sinner in his unbelief, and makes him secure there, without looking out for faith in the use of those means whereby faith might be attained. This conceit is as a great stone rolled to the door of the sepulchre, to make the soul, who lies buried in a state of unbelief, sure from starting. It is such a mistake as if a physician should judge the disease of a man desperately sick to be quite contrary to what it is, and should prescribe him physic accordingly. The patient [is] in this case under a double mischief, both which are mortal. He not only wants that which is proper for the allaying of his distemper, but he has that applied which feeds and heightens it. So the sinner, under his mistake, avoids that which is proper to his distemper, rousing and convincing truths, threatenings, and representations of the misery of unbelief. He puts away these as belonging to others, and applies the promises and sweetnesses of the gospel as his portion, presuming he is a believer; whereas, considering the true state of his soul, these are as deadly to him as poison; Satan makes use of these to destroy him. These to a believer are the savour of life; but to him, being but a believer in conceit only, they are the savour of death.

Now this mistake arises from another. He mistakes the nature of true faith, and so takes himself to be a believer, when he is not. He takes an historical faith for a justifying faith, or a temporary faith for a saving faith, or a presumptuous credulity for sound believing. Satan, concurring with a deceitful heart, can put a counterfeit faith into the habit of that which is saving, as Rebekah dressed up Jacob like his elder brother; and so far delude a credulous soul, one that is willing to have it so, as he blesses himself, takes the blessing as his portion; whereas indeed he is under the curse, and the wrath of God abides on him.

Now to remove this, the counterfeit must be uncased, the imposter must be discovered; the vizard must be taken off, that the true face of that glorious faith or presumption may be discerned, which is most commonly mistaken for that which is saving and justifying.

A sinner is thus deceived sometimes with an historical, a temporary faith, sometimes with a credulous presumption. For the former,

[1.] He believes the Scripture, that all is true, and orthodox and divine truths. He believes all the articles of the Christian faith; he does not doubt of or question any of them. He believes that all that is related in the Bible is true; that all the commands are just and good, and ought to be obeyed; that all the threatenings are true and righteous, and will be executed; that all the promises are true and gracious, and will be fulfilled. And he that believes all this, is not he a believer? Is not this faith? He

believes that Christ is the Saviour, a Saviour of sinners, those that believe; the only Saviour; that there is no salvation in any else. Hence he concludes that he has faith, and he is a believer, and shall be saved. And if any should tell him he has no faith at all, then he would wonder at it, and tell him he is very uncharitable; his faith is as good as the best.

For the discovery and removing of this dangerous mistake, take notice, that this faith comes far short of that which is saving. Though it be necessary to believe thus much, yet to believe thus much is not sufficient to salvation. There is no saving faith without this; but all this may be, and much more, where yet there is no saving faith. This is a common faith, common both to elect and reprobates; it is not that special faith which is saving, called the faith of God's elect. And to convince you of this, take some testimonies of Scripture.

Hypocrites may have such a faith as this, and apostates too, such as shall never see life. Those hearers of the word, which are compared to the stony ground, those in whom the word had no saving effect, had yet such a faith as this, Luke viii. 15. They received the word, and received it with joy, and believed too, and yet fell away, turned apostates, whereas saving faith never fails.

Reprobates may have this faith, even such as Simon Magus the sorcerer, Acts viii. 18. He believed, and continued with Philip, attending on the word which he believed, and was so affected as he was filled with wonder and admiration; and yet Peter tells him he had neither part nor lot in the Holy Ghost, in that which was saving. If he had any faith at all in reality, it could amount to no less than this; and yet his heart was not right in the sight of God, though he seemed to be right in the sight of Philip and the rest, else they would never have baptized him. Yet it was not so in the sight of God; for all his faith, and for all the show that he made of more than this, yet he was in the gall of bitterness, ver. 28. Those that are in a damnable state may have this faith.

Nay, those that are in a state of damnation actually, even the devils, may have this faith, James ii. 19. The devils know as much of the nature and attributes of God as men can know, and much more; and they know it so clearly, with evidence and conviction, as they cannot but believe it; they believe it so effectually, as it makes them tremble. Now, the truth of God is one of his attributes, so that knowing the Scripture to be the word of God, they cannot but believe that it is universally true; relations, assertions, promises, threatenings, they believe all; that which they would least believe, the threatenings, these they so believe as it makes them tremble. They believe not only natural truths, such as the light of nature can discover, but supernatural truths, such as depend upon divine revelation, the truths of Christ and the gospel.

That Christ is the Son of the living and true God, is a truth not known but by revelation, Mat. xvi. 16. Here seems to be much in Peter's acknowledgement and belief of this; yet the devils do acknowledge and believe this, Mat. viii. 28, Luke viii. 26, Mark v. 7, 8.

They believe the gospel to be the doctrine of salvation, the preaching of the gospel to be the way of salvation. This appears sufficiently by their opposing of it; but there is a plain testimony of it, Acts xvi. 16, 17. It is well if some amongst us did not come short of the devil in this. If they believed it indeed to be the way of salvation, methinks they should be more in this way. The spirit of divination, which was a devil, believes



and acknowledges that Paul and his companions were the servants of the Most High, and the gospel they preached the way of salvation.

Thus, you see, the devils believe the gospel; and there is no article of the Christian faith but they believe it, these being contained in the gospel. So that those who have no more faith than this, have no more reason to conclude they have saving faith than that the devils have it. You must have another kind of faith than this, else you shall no more see life than those that are in hell already.

Oh, but, says another, I have more than this; I not only believe that Christ is a Saviour, but I trust he will be my Saviour. I have hopes of heaven and salvation, and I hope in Christ for salvation, and I hope in Christ alone for it. Now, this is it which the devils can never attain to, though they have some kind of faith; yet their faith has no confidence, they are without hope.

For removal of mistakes in this, consider that all this may be no more than presumption. Though faith be not without some confidence, yet there may be great confidence where there is no true faith at all. Faith is not without hope; but hope there may be where there is no faith. Job speaks of the hypocrite's hope,—a hope that is not saving, that is in those who shall never be saved,—a hope like the spider's web, Job viii. 13, 14, which, together with those that rely on it, will be swept down into destruction. We have a clear instance of it in the parable of the virgins, Mat. xxv. The foolish virgins, when the door was shut, yet they come to the door, which they would never have done but that they had some hopes to be let in. They had some confidence they should be admitted into the marriage chamber as well as the rest, and they hoped in Christ the bridegroom for it; and that makes them call upon him to open, ver. 11. And it seems they hoped in him alone for it, for they apply themselves to him only; and yet this was but vain presumption, Christ shuts them out, and will not own them, ver. 12.

For a fuller discovery of this mistake, we shall lay down some grounds by which presumptuous hopes and confidence may be discovered from true faith, shewing the difference betwixt faith and presumption in some particulars which the Scripture affords us. They differ,

[1.] In their rise; *vide* Sermon on James.

[2.] In their object. Faith pitches upon whole Christ, presumption will but have part of him. Christ is so precious in the eye of faith, it cannot endure he should be divided; he cannot spare, he cannot be without any of him. He will not have the Lord Jesus separated; he will have him as a Lord as well as a Jesus, as his Lawgiver no less than a Saviour. That is the voice of faith in Thomas, John xx. 27–29, as a Lord to rule him as well as a Jesus to save him.

He embraces Christ coming by water as well as blood. He would have him for purity as much as for pardon, for sanctification as much as for satisfaction. Pardon will not satisfy him without purity; heaven will not please him without holiness; he sees something of it in holiness. He would have complete redemption. He would be redeemed not only from hell, and death, and the wrath to come, but from that which might give Christ any distaste at present, he would be redeemed from a carnal temper within, from a vain conversation without. He counts it but the one half of salvation to be saved from hell hereafter, and the powers of darkness.

His lusts are an affliction, a torment to him, if he were freed from other

tormentors. A carnal, worldly temper, corrupt temper of heart, is a misery something like hell to him. He would have Christ to save him, to save him from these, or else he cannot count himself happy. He would have Christ to be his King in all his royalties. He is welcome to him, not only with his crown for glory and happiness, but with his sword and sceptre. He would have Christ come with his sword to circumcise his heart, to cut him off from carnal, worldly interest, to wound his lusts, to put to death his dearest corruption. The sceptre of Christ is lovely and glorious in his eye. He would have him come into his soul with the government upon his shoulders. He desires nothing more than to be brought fully and unreservedly under the government of Christ. He would have Christ reign in him here in holiness and righteousness, as much as he would reign with him hereafter in glory and happiness. Here is the proper genius and the true strain, the genuine character of saving faith; and he would have all Christ, and this above all.

But now presumption would have Christ divided; it can be content with part of him. It shews itself to be presumption in that it will pick and choose something in Christ it likes, something in Christ it dislikes; it will take what it likes, and leaves the rest. A presumer, he would have Christ's righteousness to satisfy justice, procure him a pardon, and purchase him heaven; but he cares not for Christ's holiness. When he looks upon that, he sees no beauty in it, nor comeliness that he should desire it. Such strictness, such holiness, such purity, he hopes he may be saved without that; however, he will venture it. He has no mind to the strait and holy ways of Christ; that is a yoke too grievous, it is a burden too heavy; he hopes Christ will be so gracious as to dispense with him here: The Lord be merciful to me in this, I cannot digest it! As much of Jesus as you will, but as little of him as Lord; or if as Lord, yet not really, universally, or solely.

Not really. He will call him Lord, profess and acknowledge him to be his Lord as well as the best. So the foolish virgins, Mat. xxv.; and those presumptuous hypocrites, Mat. vii. 21, 22. This was verbal, not real; but while his tongue confesses him, his heart does not stoop to him.

Or if they yield to him in some things, yet not in all; if they admit him as their Lord, yet not as absolute Lord; they submit but in part, not universally. Some things they may do, yea, many things, in compliance with Christ, but not all; something or other seems too precise, too difficult, too hazardous; it entrenches too much upon their ease, or pleasures, or carnal humours, or worldly interest; the sceptre of Christ must waive that.

Some sins they will leave, yea, many sins; but some or other is too pleasant, and too gainful, and that is the reason they cannot part with it; the sword of Christ must not touch it.

Here is presumption indeed! If they entertain Christ, either he must come without his sceptre, or else his sceptre must be broken; they will not come under the entire government of Christ. Either he must lay aside his sword, or else it must be only unsheathed at their discretion. He must spare what they cannot part with, and do execution only where they will appoint him, and yet they will hope to be saved by him. Can presumption appear in more lively colours? Alas, how apparent is this in most of those who say they hope in Christ for salvation! And how many, in whom it is not so apparent, yet in their own consciences, if they would look there impartially, they might read this presumption put together with all their

hopes, or indeed made up of nothing else, so that if this presumption were subtracted from them, the hopes remaining would be a cypher, and stand for nothing, except it be to delude them.

[8.] In the grounds. Presumption properly is a confidence without ground. Then he presumes, who is confident he shall be saved, when his confidence has no bottom; either no ground at all, or that which is as good as none. The grounds of presumption, such as they be, are either without or within him. Without him, such as these, God is merciful, he delights not in the death of sinners, he would have all men to be saved, &c. Christ is a Saviour, he died to save sinners, &c.

These indeed, when there is a special reason for a particular application, are grounds of hope, but to one who is yet in impenitency and unbelief, they afford no more hopes than to Cain or Judas; for why might not either of them draw this conclusion from the premises as well as such a one? Yet if Cain, or Judas, or the like, should conclude thus, God is merciful; Christ died for sinners, *ergo* I shall be saved, who would not say this is presumption?

The grounds within them are ordinarily their own righteousness, their good meaning, purposes, inclinations; they mean well, whatever fault be found with them. They do no man wrong, give every one his own, are not so bad as others, nay, much better than many about them. Upon such grounds did the presumptuous Pharisee raise his confidence, Luke xviii. 11, 12; or their outward conformities and enjoyment of ordinances, such as theirs, Luke xiii. 87, &c.; or upon their performances, doing much in an outward formal way of religion. So theirs, Mat. vii. 22, 23. But now a true believer grounds his confidence and hopes of heaven upon something which the Scripture assigns as proper and peculiar to the heirs of heaven, which can be found in none but those that are in a saving state. He draws not his conclusion but from such premises as are confirmed by the Spirit of God. He concludes his interest in mercy and salvation, because he finds the first fruits of salvation, the effects of special mercy, in his soul, he has the earnest of the Spirit in his heart, this makes sure the contract for eternal life, Eph. i. He concludes Christ died for him, because he finds the saving effects of his death produced in his soul. He has lively hopes, because he is alive to God, he is born again, he is begotten to these hopes, 1 Peter i. 8. His hopes of glory arise from Christ within him, Col. i. 27. He finds Christ dwelling in him, Eph. iii. 7, working in him, acting him by his Spirit, and thereby testifying to him that he is a son, and so an heir. He concludes that he is in Christ, because he is 'a new creature,' 2 Cor. v. 17. He finds 'old things passed away, and all things become new.' His old vain, carnal, wanton imaginations are passed away. His old secure, benumbed, unfaithful conscience is passed away. His old perverse, stubborn, rebellious will, he has a new will. His old strong, sensual, corrupt, unbelieving, impenitent heart is gone; he has a new heart, a heart of flesh, bearing the image of Christ. His old disordered, misplaced, inordinate affections, &c., his old vain, sinful conversation is altered, he has a new life, all things are become new. He has new thoughts, new inclinations, new intentions, new designs, new resolutions, new desires, new delights, new employments, new conversation, all suitable to the state and hopes of a new creature, becoming one who is renewed in the spirit of his mind, which has put on that new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness, as the apostle speaks, Eph. iv. 22-24. He can say, he was sometimes darkness,

but now he is light in the Lord, Eph. v. 8; sometimes carnal, but now in some measure spiritual; sometimes worldly, but now in some degree has his conversation in heaven; sometimes profane, but now in part holy. There is such a change, as in the Corinthians, 1 Cor. vi. 9-11.

[4.] In the effects. As faith and presumption do differ in their nature, so they produce different effects, and these effects may be referred to three heads. They respect Christ, or sin, or the persons themselves.

*First.* The effects of faith, in reference to Christ, are a high esteem of him, strong desires after him, unfeigned love to him.

Presumption does not transcendently value Christ so as to prefer him before his chief joy; nor effectually desire him, so as to part with all for him; nor sincerely love him, so as to cleave to him only. Something takes place of Christ in his mind and heart, though it may be self-love (which is very strong in a presumptuous confident) does so blind him as he does not perceive it, will not believe it. But of these effects of faith I have spoken sufficiently in the explication.

*Secondly.* The effects of faith in reference to sin are fear of it, hatred of it, sorrow for it. Faith sets the heart fully against sin, as that which is dreadful, hateful, and most grievous, whereas presumption slights sin, at least some sins, makes no great matter of them, cleaves to some, and is indifferent as to others; presumes it shall go well with him though he go on in this or that evil way.

*First.* A true believer fears sin; faith makes him afraid of it as of a dreadful evil, Heb. xi. 7. Where faith is in the heart, the heart is moved with fear, this makes such an impression on him, all the scorn of the world will not prevail with him to neglect a duty. Though he see not the effects of sin, though they be future and at a great distance, as the flood seemed to be, yet being warned of God, he is moved with fear. His own experience is enough to render sin fearful to him. He has felt the burden of sin oppressing his soul, he is afraid to add more weight to a pressure that he has found too heavy for him. While the Lord was working faith in his heart, he found his iniquities going over his head, Ps. xxxviii. 4. He has felt sin straining his conscience. He remembers the anguish of a wounded spirit, he is now afraid of it as of a serpent. His soul has been scorched with sin, he remembers that it kindled wrath in his soul, and now he dreads the fire, is afraid of coming near the flame; whereas presumption is bold and venturous, will play with the flame, will be tampering with some evil or other, though it singe him, and at last he drops into hell, as the moth, making too bold with the candle, at last loses her wings, and falls down lame or dead before it.

The voice of faith is that of Joseph, 'How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God!' but the voice of presumption is like that of Lot concerning Zoar; he says of this or that sin, 'Is it not a little one?' my soul may live in it and be secure.

That which seems to be a great sin to faith seems a little one to presumption; that which faith trembles at, this makes bold with it. He presumes that the Lord is not so strict and severe as to condemn him for not straining at such sins as he counts but like a gnat, presumes he may come to heaven though he be not so strict and precise as the word would have him. To be so precise, is to be over righteous in his conceit, he will make bold to gratify himself in one or other forbidden path, whatever come of it. Presumption is a bold, a venturous humour; he blesses himself,

and says, I shall have peace, though he walk after the stubbornness of his own heart.

Secondly. A true believer hates sin. He is not only angry at it, displeased with it, but he hates it, pursues it to the death, seeks its ruin, would have it utterly destroyed, root and branch, the body of death and all its members, would have the whole crucified, and shews his hatred by diligence in use of all means to get it mortified. He hates all sin, every false way, even those that he has most loved, wherein he has most delighted. His hatred is universal and impartial. Faith in Christ is always accompanied with a dear love to Christ, and love to Christ always attended with hatred of sin: Ps. xevii. 10, 'Ye that love the Lord, hate evil.' Being so much in love with Christ, and knowing there is nothing so contrary, so injurious, so hateful to Christ as sin, he cannot but hate that which is so contrary to him whom his soul loves, Ps. cxxxix. 21. Every sin is hateful to Christ, and therefore he hates every sin. But self-love is predominant in the presumer; he hates sin no further than self-love leads him, no further than it is contrary to his own humours, inconsistent with his own interest, or disagreeing with his temper.

Hatred springs from some contrariety betwixt the person so affected and the object hated. Now a believer has a new nature, to which sin is as contrary as darkness is to light, John i. 11, 12. Now as in the natural birth, so in this supernatural, there is a new form, a new nature; he is renewed after the image of God in holiness. Now sin and holiness are as contrary as hell and heaven, as filthiness and purity. Hence it is, that there is in every true believer an antipathy to sin, as being contrary to that new nature. That divine nature which he partakes of, he comes to partake of it by the promises, and so consequently by faith, without which the promises afford us nothing, 2 Pet. i. 4; and by this escapes the pollutions of the world through lust. This divine nature puts him upon this, by all means to flee to Christ, make an escape from the pollutions of sin, as that which is hateful and contrary to him.

But there is no such principle in a presumer, and therefore no such act. He may be angry at sin, and so may avoid it, and put some restraint upon it, so as he may seem to have escaped the pollution, but he hates it not; he contents himself to restrain it, that it break not forth into outward acts, but he seeks not to ruin it. Or though he may hate some sin, as being contrary to his temper, or inconsistent with his credit, profit, safety, or other interests, but he does not hate all sin; there is one or other that he is always in love or league with; and if he would deal faithfully and impartially with his soul, he might discover it. But presumption is a blind, hood-winked boldness, which, as it will not see that which is hateful in a beloved sin, so it will not see, will not believe that he loves it. Or if this cannot be avoided, rather than his presumptuous heart will yield to conviction, he will presume that the sin which he loves and lives in, is no sin, or at least, no such sin as will keep him out of heaven, or argue a damnable state.

Thirdly. Sorrow for sin. A believing heart is a new heart, a heart of flesh, a heart that receives deep impressions from the love of Christ, a heart that will melt and bleed when he remembers the injuries, the unkindnesses that he has offered to Christ, Zech. xii. 10. When the soul looks upon Christ with the eye of faith, when he sees what he has done, and against whom he has done it; when he sees Christ pierced, and pierced by him, and willing to be wounded, that the soul that was thus unkind, thus cruel

to him, might have life by him, oh this makes him mourn, and mourn greatly, and mourn bitterly, as they mourned for Josiah at Hadadrimmon, a place in the valley of Megiddon, where that peerless prince was slain.

The soul looks upon Christ, represented in this posture in the gospel, set forth there, as if he were pierced and crucified before his eyes. His eye sees, and so sees this spectacle of love and wonder, as his eye affects his heart. Oh, says he, what have I done? what have I been doing all this while that I have lived in sin? Have I been all this while piercing Christ? Has every sin (when I am guilty of so many) wounded Christ? Have I been all this while crucifying him, and put him to an open shame? Have I been piercing him who loves me, who so loved me as to be willing to die for me? And does he now love one who has been so unkind, so cruel to him? Will he pardon me after such provocations? Will he think thoughts of love and peace to one that has thus used him? Will he embrace one who is covered with such bloody sins? Why, yes; behold he offers love to such a wretch; he stretches out his arms to embrace me who have pierced him; he will make no other use of those wounds that I have given him, but to heal me by them. Oh the wonders of Christ's love! Oh the bloody guilt of my sins! Oh these thoughts enter deep into a believing heart: it melts him, he is all dissolved into sorrow. The rod of Moses did not smite the rock more effectually when the waters gushed out of it, than this thought, this sight of a pierced Christ, strikes and pierces the heart. He now tastes in his sins the bitterness of death, the bitterness of Christ's death; no wonder if he mourn bitterly.

But now a presumptuous heart is a hard heart; it is a heart of stone. It melts not, it bleeds not, when it sees Christ set forth bleeding and dying. The love of Christ makes no deep impressions on it; it glides off, as water from a stone. There is no such heart-meltings, no such passionate relentings, no such breaking reflections on Christ or upon sin, no such great or bitter mourning.

Presumption is impudent. He hardens his face, and will not blush in secret for all his unworthy dealings with Christ. His heart is hardened; it will not bleed, though he sees Christ pierced before him. Indeed, how can it be that his heart should break into sorrow for that which his heart loves and delights in?

*Thirdly.* The effects, in reference to these persons, are humility and watchfulness in the believer, pride and security in the presuming.

First. A believing heart is a humble heart. Faith lays the soul low, in sense of its own vileness, emptiness, impotency; in sense of former sinfulness, present unworthiness; in sense of its many wants, weaknesses, distempers, corruption. As nothing more exalteth Christ, so nothing more debaseth man. As it advances man high in the account of God, so it lays him low in his own eyes. The Lord, having a design to display the riches of his grace, made choice of faith as the fittest instrument, as that which gives all to God, and nothing to man. It is the soul's going out of himself, as having nothing but sin and misery, unto Christ for all. It has a double aspect: one to himself, there it sees nothing but guilt, weakness, emptiness; another to Christ, and there it sees righteousness, strength, all-sufficiency.

Faith empties a man of himself, self-conceit, self-sufficiency, self-confidence, makes him seem nothing, that Christ may be all in all. Where the strongest faith, the greatest humility, Mat. viii. 7-10; judges himself unworthy of the least favour, counts himself the greatest of sinners, less

than the least of all mercies, thinks better of others than of himself, patient of reproofs, and ready to stoop to the meanest service that Christ shall call him to ; ascribes all he has to Christ and grace.

Whereas presumption is proud and haughty, swells a man full, and raises him high in his own conceit. It is attended with self-conceit and self-confidence ; thinks well of himself, and stands upon his own bottom ; counts himself fit for services above him, and is impatient of reproofs, contradictions, and what he judges undervaluings. Some strains hereof are visible in that presumptuous Pharisee, Luke xviii. 11, 12.

Secondly. A holy jealousy and watchfulness over himself, Rom. xi. 20. Because he stands by faith, therefore he is not high-minded or self-confident, but wary and watchful ; careful that he may not receive the grace of God in vain ; fearful lest he should make unworthy returns ; jealous over his heart, as knowing it to be treacherous and unfaithful ; watchful over his spirit, that it do not start aside from Christ ; careful that no mercy may slip his notice, that no rod or affliction may speak in vain ; keeps a strict hand over his soul in all his ways, especially in ordinances of worship ; trembles at the word ; and in a word, works out his salvation with fear and trembling. Easy to be convinced of miscarriages, thankful for such discoveries, such smittings are acceptable to him, when he is himself ; and ordinarily his own heart smites him first, and more than others.

But presumption is careless and secure, gives the reins to his heart. The temper of his spirit is loose and negligent, even in acts of worship ; bears up against conviction in miscarriage, staves it off, and is stubborn against the word when it crosses him.

We may see this in the deportment of the Jews, the presumptuous part of them, under the ministry of Christ himself.

[5.] In their properties. True faith being a form far differing from presumption, the properties that flow from it are far different.

*First.* It is a purifying faith. The confidence, which is either the act or attendant of it, is a lively hope, that will be working out all impurity of flesh and spirit. As a living spring will not long continue mudded, but is still working out the mud and impure mixtures which defile it, 1 John iii. 3. *Vide* sermon on Mat. vii. 21. 1. He makes it his work. 2. It is his beauty. Impurity is an eye-sore to faith ; this looks upon sin as its deformity and defilement, as that which is nasty and loathsome. Now as one that affects beauty will not endure anything upon the face, the seat of beauty, which is nasty and loathsome, will use all means to wash off such a defilement, to remove that which is looked upon as an ugly defilement, so does he who has this hope labour to purify himself from the defilements of sin, to free himself from it, as that which he knows is most loathsome to Christ, in whose eye he would be lovely. And Christ is his pattern. 'He that hath this hope in Christ, purifies himself as Christ is pure.' He sets the holiness of Christ before him as his pattern ; he would have that purity copied out in his soul ; he would be holy, as he is holy ; he would have 'the same mind to be in him which was in Christ.' And though he knows, when he has done his best, he shall come far short of this high example, yet since the Lord has set it before him, he will strive to come as near it as he can. He will be following of Christ, though it be *haur passibus aquis*, though it be at a great distance, through the weakness of the flesh. Though he come far short of him, yet he will strive to keep Christ in his sight, Heb. xii. 1, 2. Though he cannot make so large steps as his glorious forerunner, yet he will be careful to make straight steps to

his feet; he will not step out of that holy way wherein Christ is gone before him; he will not turn aside to the right hand or to the left, into by-paths of sin and vanity; but endeavours to follow Christ fully, fully, though weakly. Other examples, even the greatest, he will not follow further, or otherwise, than they follow Christ, 1 Cor. xi. 1, 1 Pet. ii. 21. He will not encourage himself, by the sins and failings of the most eminent saints, to grow loose, or take liberty to do the least thing that may be offensive. They did thus and thus formerly, they do so and so now. Well, says he, be it so, but they are not my pattern. Would Christ do so and so? I must follow him.

Ay, but presumption writes not after this copy. This will make bold to waive Christ's footsteps, where the way seems cross, or rugged, or deep, or difficult; especially if he see any, who have the repute of holiness, go before him herein. He copies out the blots of God's saints, those characters in their lives which agree not with the original. He encourages himself by their sins and failings; his hopes feed upon their corruptions, and nourish themselves thereby. Noah, Lot, David, Peter, these and these sinned thus and thus, and yet were saved. My sins, says he, that I fall into now and then, are not worse, are not so bad as these. And therefore though I continue in this or that evil, why should I doubt of salvation? Here is the true face of presumption without any mask.

A true believer abuses not his hopes, so as to grow more loose, to sin more freely, to make more liberty to himself in things doubtful or suspicious, to be negligent of more purity, careless of an increase in holiness, higher degrees of grace. He argues not thus: My condition is safe, I am sure of heaven, therefore I need care for no more; if I should take liberty in such and such things, to decline a little from the strictness of the rule, it would cut me off from salvation; and therefore why should I not gratify myself herein? He contents not himself with such a degree of purity, such a measure of holiness, as will be sufficient barely to bring him to heaven. No; but because he has this hope, therefore he is more careful to avoid sin, therefore he purifies himself more and more, therefore he would be more heavenly, therefore he strives after more holiness. Hope spurs him on in the way that is called holy; hope makes those ways pleasant and delightful to him; hope quickens his endeavours, makes him unwearied in the pursuit of holiness, engages him cheerfully against all difficulties, incumbrances, opposition, that would hinder his growth and proficiency in holiness.

Those hopes that encourage a person to sin more freely, to walk more loosely, to count strictness and preciseness more than needs, to count purity and holiness in the strength, life, power, exercise, and daily increase of it needless, any degree of holiness or righteousness too much, they are no better than a damning and deluding presumption.

These hopes put a man upon an universal purity; purifies himself, all that is in himself, both inward and outward man, and that especially which is most himself, his heart and soul, Acts xv. 9. Faith purifies both heart and life, but it exerts its purifying virtue first in the heart. That is the spring of impurity; and the streams will never run clear to purpose in the conversation, till the spring be cleansed. 'A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, brings forth good things,' Mat. xii. 33. Till the heart be good, nothing is good; till that be purified, all is defiled. Even that which makes the greatest show of purity, that holiness which is not minted in the heart, and brought out into the life from thence, as out of a



good treasury, however it glisters, it is but counterfeit coin, it is not current with Christ, however it may be with men. When he brings it to the touchstone, it will be found but dross, or gilded wickedness. It is not of the stamp of heaven, if it bear not the impression of that precious faith which purifies the heart. A true believer will not content himself with outward purity, with visible holiness, a refined conversation, though he has all care of that; but if he could converse in the world like an angel, as to outward purity, holiness, innocency, yet, so long as he find vain thoughts lodge in his mind, so long as he feels sinful, impure notions stirring in his heart, though they should never break forth into outward act, nay, though they should never procure full inward consent, yet this he accounts an impurity, a defilement not to be endured. Those secret motions of sin, which no eye sees but the eye of God, are his burden and affliction. Faith makes him restless, industrious to get his heart and mind purified from these. These buds of that root of bitterness, his natural corruption, he is cropping them off, casting them out as that which defiles him. He is daily striking at the root itself, that by degrees his heart may be cleansed from that mass of corruption.

But now presumption rests in an external purity, satisfy themselves with an outside holiness, consisting in avoiding gross sins, and the outward acts of religion and righteousness, and presume upon this they shall get to heaven, whoever be excluded. In the mean time they trouble not themselves with inward purity, to get their minds and hearts purged; sinful thoughts, impure motions are tolerated. The body of sin is no burden. The stirrings and actings of natural corruption are winked at. All is well enough, if it break not forth into open acts. If the outside be clean, they look no further. This they take as a sufficient evidence for heaven. They will scarce believe that there are any who do more. This was the very temper of the presumptuous Pharisees, who were so confident of heaven, as though it had been reserved alone for them. Thus does Christ describe them, while he pricks their swelling confidence with those sharp menaces, *Mat. xxiii. 25-27.*

I have insisted the longer on this head, because the particulars in it are very plain and distinguishing; so as, if you would deal faithfully with your souls, in applying them, and examining by them, you might be able to discern whether the hopes of heaven be the issues of a true faith, or of a vain presumption.

1. The presumer makes not holiness his work, it is not his great business to purify himself. He minds it not seriously. If he mind it at all, it is but upon the by. There is something else that is more his design, which has not only more of his time and endeavours, but more of his heart.

2. Holiness is not purity to him. It is not an ornament, a beauty in his eye. He is not in love with it. The face of it is not so lovely, that he should be at so much pains to wipe off, to wash out the spots which are contrary to it. As the judgments or fancies of some persons are so depraved by custom or example, that they count a spotted, a patched, a painted face beautiful, so these confidants please themselves with their bespotted souls, yea, and presume that the Lord is pleased with them; so well pleased with them, as that he will admit them into heaven, though they be not cleansed, purged, purified. And, which heightens this presumption, they will believe this in contradiction to what the Lord has plainly and positively declared, that 'without holiness no man shall see the Lord,'

and that the pure in heart are blessed by God, and shall alone be admitted to see him.

*Secondly.* True faith is working faith. Presumption is an idle fancy. Saving faith is operative, Gal. v. 6, *ἐργαζομένη*. It worketh, and it 'worketh by love.' It worketh, and therefore called effectual, Philem. 6, and 1 Thes. ii. 13. There is an effectual working in those that believe. It is effectual to make them walk worthy of God, verse 12. How that? Why, as the apostle, verse 10. Where this is rooted in the heart, it grows up and spreads itself in all the branches of obedience, and is filled with the fruits of righteousness. It makes a man active for God, and thereby shews it is a living principle, a lively faith, a lively hope, 1 Peter i. 8; whereas the hope and faith of presumers is dead: no breathings after Christ, no vigorous motions towards him, no lively actings for him. No wonder, for it is dead, and hereby appears to be so, James ii. 17; verse 20, he says it again, it is as a carcase, a body without a soul. Not that good works are the soul of faith, but because they are the vital acts of it. Where there is no vital acts, there is no soul; because the soul where it is will be acting, will shew itself by acts of life. Even a new-born infant, though it cannot walk and work as a grown man, yet it cries, and breathes, and moves, and sucks; and hereby shews it is alive, that there is a soul, a principle of life in it. Whereas a child coming into the world, if it do not put forth some of these acts, if it do not cry, move, or breathe at least, we then conclude it is still-born, it is already dead. Not because these acts are its life, but because they are the signs of life.

So that the apostle makes good works to be the vital acts of faith, whereby a living faith may be distinguished from a dead. Presumption, if it do not cry after God, move towards him, breathe after him, cling to him, as the child to the breast, act for him in a lively manner, according to the proportion of strength received, it is but a molar, a lump of flesh, not informed with a living soul. Though there may seem to have been some conception, some tumour, yea, some travail too, some legal pangs like those of the new birth, yet that which is brought forth is but a dead thing, if it want these vital acts which the apostle calls works. It is but a picture of faith, how much soever it resemble it. Though it have the colour, the features, the lineaments, the proportions of a living child, yet these are no more than you may see in a picture. Without these acts it is but a painted faith. If you would make it appear to be alive indeed, you must do it by the acts of obedience, by good works.

*Quest.* But you will say, May not presumptuous hypocrites do good works? May not they abound in them? in good works of all sorts, works of charity, and works of righteousness, and works of piety and religion? Did not the Pharisees exceed in works of piety? Was not that a notable work of charity in Ananias and Sapphira, when they sold their estate, and brought the greatest part of it to be disposed of for the relief of those that were in want? Did not those presumptuous hypocrites, Mat. vii. 22, do many wonderful works? If good works be common to both, how can this be a distinguishing character to know the one from the other?

*Ans.* Presumption may be attended with good works, and a presumer may go as far in this respect as a true believer. He may do the same works, if you look only to the outside of them; but if you look in the inside of those works, there is a great difference; and such a one as a man, if he will faithfully and impartially examine, may discern in himself, though he cannot discern in another.

This difference is intimated by the apostle James, ii. 28 ; he wrought for God as a friend, and so the Lord accounted him. His works were acts of friendship to God ; they proceeded from love to him ; not out of love, or fear of punishment, or hopes of reward only ; but because he was a friend, and loved him. A true friend, though he have no fear to lose any thing, nor hopes to gain any thing by what he does, yet he will appear and act for his friend. Why ? Because he loves him. Thus it was with Abraham, and thus it is with every true believer. If there were neither heaven nor hell, neither hopes of the one, nor fear of the other, yet he would do what is well pleasing to God ; he would be acting for him because he is his friend, he loves him. Where there is love, there will be acts of love ; and the acts of this love and friendship to God is obedience, John xiv. 15, and xv. 14.

But this difference, which is but intimated by James, is plainly expressed by Paul, Gal. v. 6, ' Faith works by love.' Presumption works by something else ; he has some other principle or motive that sets him a-work. The papist works that he may merit heaven. The Pharisee works that he may be applauded, that he may be seen of men, that he may have a good esteem, a good report with them. The slave works lest he should be beaten, lest he should be damned. The formalist works, that he may stop the mouth of conscience, that will be accusing, disquieting him, if he do nothing. The time-server works, because it is the custom, the fashion, the way to stand or to rise, to gain his own ends, or secure his own interest. The ordinary professor works, because it is a shame to do nothing, where so much is professed ; the temporary, because he is in a good mood. These are all presumers in their kind, or as bad as presumers. But the true believer works because he loves. This is the principal, if not the only motive, that sets him a-work. If there were no other motive within or without him, yet would he be working for God, acting for Christ, because he loves him ; it is like fire in his bones.

But presumption works not by love. Either it is idle, or it is acted by some other principle. Some of the fore-mentioned motives, or some other of like nature, set him a-work, when he betakes himself to any work that is good. If he acted by love, it is not love to Christ, but self-love. Indeed, the presumer makes himself his centre : all the lines in the whole circumference of his life, all his acts and works that have a show of goodness, are drawn from hence ; and here they all meet and are united. He loves himself so well, as he would be happy, he would not be damned, he would be applauded and esteemed, he would not be disquieted by a clamorous accusing conscience, he would avoid reproach and shame, he would compass his own ends. And these, or the like, are the weights that set all the wheels on motion when he seems to move for God ; if these were taken off, all would stand still. Love does not sway him. Faith is active, and works for God, because he loves ; and presumption is idle, or else works for himself, being acted by self-love.

*Thirdly*, True faith is precious ; it is like gold, it will endure a trial. Presumption is but a counterfeit, cannot abide to be tried, 1 Pet. i. 7. A true believer fears no trial. He is willing to be tried by God, Psa. xxvi. 2, cxxxix. 23. He is willing to have his faith tried by others, he shuns not the touchstone. He is much in trying himself. He would not take anything upon trust, especially that which is of such moment. He is willing to hear the worst as well as the best. That preaching pleases him best which is most searching and distinguishing, Heb. iv. 12. He is loath to be deluded with vain hopes. He would not be flattered into a good

conceit of his spiritual state without ground. When trials are offered, he complies with the apostle's advice, 2 Cor. xiii. 15.

But presumption takes things upon trust, will not be at the trouble to try, and is loath to be troubled with searching truths. That teaching pleases him best, which keeps at a distance, comes not near his conscience, makes no scrutiny in his soul. Such a man as would convince him that his hopes are but delusions, his confidence presumption, he takes him for an enemy, though he do but tell him the truth, and that truth which is most necessary for him. When he is called to trial in the ministry of the word, and means offered whereby his heart might be searched, he keeps off, as a cheater would keep off from the touchstone with his counterfeit coin. Why, would you drive me to despair? says he; trouble not me with so many scruples; I trust my faith is as good as those who make a greater show: however, God is merciful, and I will trust him with my salvation without more ado. And thus he is willing to delude himself; ay, and will be deluded. Those that do pity him, and would undeceive him, are suspected, or scorned, or hated.

*Fourthly*, True faith is growing. It comes not to its full stature at once, but by degrees. There is a growing from faith to faith, Rom. i. 17, a passing from weakness to strength, and from one degree of strength to another, and in the way a conflicting with doubts, weaknesses, discouragements, opposition. So it passes from acceptance to dependence, and from dependence on him for pardon and life, to a life of dependence, a resting on him for all things; and from dependence to assurance, and from a weak assurance to a full assurance. The beginnings of it are small and weak, and there is a sense of this weakness, and strivings after increase. 'I believe,' &c., Mark ix. 24. A true believer is apprehensive of his weakness, and feeble as his faith is, finding unbelief strong, is struggling with it, complains of it, bewails it, diligent in the use of all means to get faith encouraged and strengthened, and grows up accordingly.

But now presumption starts up on a sudden, and comes to its full growth and maturity in a moment. There is no such sense of weakness, meets with no such opposition, finds no such cause to complain of unbelief, no such wrestling with doubts, no such need of diligence for increase. His faith, *i. e.*, his presumption, is as strong at the first, as it is after many years' standing; sensible of no increase in the use of means.

*Fifthly*, In the extent. True faith, in its actings, reaches both to the things of eternity and the things of this life. Presumption trusts God only as to his soul and salvation; things which he less minds than temporal things. A true believer trusts God with all. A presumer hopes, or, as he says, trusts that God will be gracious to his soul; but as to the things of the world he trusts himself; he will rely upon his own wit, or prudence, or industry, or friends, or parts, or interest. That which we mind not, value not, we can be more free to leave to the care and in the trust of others; but that which is above all dear to us, we are cautious in trusting any with it but ourselves. This is the truth of the business. Those that ordinarily presume so much of heaven, the things of this life are dearest to them, and most valued by them, therefore they will take care of these themselves; but the things of eternity they much mind not, and therefore they leave these, as they say, to God's mercy. So that their trusting God with their souls is no more than this in plain English, they do not much mind them. And this appears, in that they think no industry and pains too much, all care little enough for their estates or posterity,

little fear lest their care should be immoderate, lest it should intrench too much upon that care and time that is due to their souls; little or no scruple lest the means they use, the courses they take, should be irregular. Or if there be any scruple, yet if they see the same used ordinarily by others, that will be a sufficient *salvo*, a sufficient warrant to proceed therein.

They make haste to be rich or great, or get from under the cross, poverty, disrespect, &c. They will take nearer ways than God sets open to them; they will not stay to take God along with them, or to see him going before them (as those that trust him will do), they will not be hindered by busying themselves much about their souls, they are in haste: and hereby they shew plainly they believe not in God; for he that believes will not make haste, Isa. xxviii. 16. He that truly trusts in him, will stay God's time, and use God's means, and walk in God's way, though it seem about; they will not neglect their souls for haste; they know this would be to make more haste than good speed. Nor would they step out of the way, the way that is holy and righteous, though they may escape a loss, an affliction by it, though they might gain some desirable advantage by it. True faith goes leaning upon God, and therefore will keep his way, Ps. xxxvii. 34. He that will not be liberal for the promoting and honouring of the gospel; he that fears poverty or affliction more than he fears sin; he that is more careful for the things of the world than for his soul; he that takes indirect or suspected courses, to get, or increase, or secure his estate; he that is not jealous or watchful, lest his cares for the world (when he is much engaged therein) should be immoderate,—it is plain he does not trust God with his estate; and he that does not trust God for his estate, whatever he think or pretend, he does not trust God for his soul, for his salvation; his hopes of heaven and salvation are but presumption.

Thus I have given you an account of the differences betwixt faith and presumption; and hereby, if you deal faithfully with your souls, you may be able to discern whether you truly believe indeed, or whether you only presume. This may be sufficient through the Lord's concurrence to discover mistakes in this weighty business, and so to remove the first impediment which keeps men from faith, viz., a conceit they have faith, when in truth they have no such thing.

2. Impediment. A conceit that faith is a business of no great difficulty. Men wonder why any should make such ado about believing; they think it an easy thing to believe, and so trouble not themselves much about it, make it not their business to look after it. This conceit being so common, it is a plain evidence there are few who have it. Those who think it such an easy matter to believe, shew plainly they never did believe, nay, they do not so much as know what it is to believe indeed. And as it is a sign they want it, so it is an impediment that keeps them from it.

To remove it, consider what the Scriptures declare concerning faith in opposition to this conceit.

(1.) It is the gift of God. It is not the work of man's hand, or of his head, or of his heart. It is something without him, not in him naturally; something above him, out of the reach of nature, though improved and raised to the height. It must be reached down by the hand of God, otherwise man can never come by it: Philip. i. 29, 'To you it is given,' &c. It is not a gift of nature, nor a gift acquired by the improvement of nature's abilities, but a gift supernatural, a gift of grace, Eph. ii. 8. Both salvation and faith are of grace; neither of them of ourselves, both the gift of God. What Christ said to Pilate in another case, is true here, John

xix. 11. There is no seeds of it, no propensity to it in nature, it must come from a foreign hand ; nay, there is no power in nature to receive it when it is offered ; the hand is full, and *intus existens*, &c. : 'How can ye believe ?' John v. 44.

(2.) Man is naturally unwilling to receive it. Not only without it, unable to procure it, but unwilling to receive it, John v. 40. Coming is believing. Now, though Christ, who is truth itself, told them this was the only way to life, yet, though their life lay on it, they were not willing to come, they were resolved not to come at him, not to believe. Is not he unwilling to receive a thing who will die rather than receive it ? Oh but though they were unwilling to come to Christ, yet suppose Christ should condescend to come and offer himself to them, could they be then unwilling ? Sure then we should see them willing to receive him. No ; not then : 'He came to his own, and his own received him not,' John i. 11. Those who challenged the Messias as peculiar to themselves, those to whom he was promised, those who had so long expected his coming, yet when he comes, they receive him not. So the Lord complains : 'Israel would none of me.' Christ takes up the complaint, Mat. xxiii. 27. They would not be gathered by him, when he would have gathered them ; they would not receive him, when he offered himself to them. They were so far from receiving him, as they hated the sight of him : 'Light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light,' John iii. 19. Here is not only a bare unwillingness, but an averseness rising up into hatred, Isa. lxxv. 2. Here is not only an unwillingness, but a rebellious opposition. And such an opposition to faith, to Christ, there is in the heart of every man till born again. Ye do but flatter and delude yourselves if you think you are better disposed than the Jews. It is thus with every man, all men, though no natural man will believe it. The Jews could think better of themselves than they were ; this is not only the delusion of these days, Mat. xxiii. 29. They would not believe they should have opposed the prophets, as their forefathers did, and yet even then were they opposing Christ himself, the prince of prophets. No wonder if men will not believe now they oppose Christ and faith, even when in the ministry of the word they do daily resist and oppose them. But however you delude yourselves, this is the truth of God ; there is a desperate opposition in every unregenerate heart against faith, against Christ himself.

(3.) This opposition is so strong as it requires an exceeding mighty power to overcome it.

The power of nature cannot master it. Indeed, this is wholly employed for the strengthening of unbelief, to enforce the opposition against faith. The stronger a man's parts are, wit, memory, judgment, reason, affections, the more vigorously does he oppose faith. That is evident in the scribes and Pharisees, men amongst the Jews of greatest parts ; and those most heightened and improved, in them the opposition was strongest.

The power of divine institutions alone cannot master this. What more powerful than the word ? Yet this alone cannot prevail : 'The weapons of our warfare,' 2 Cor. x. 4, 5, 'mighty through God ;' ay, but in themselves too weak for unbelief ; too weak, though managed by an apostle, the greatest of the apostles. 'Paul may plant ;' ay, but all this is labour in vain without a higher, a mightier power, 1 Cor. iii. 5-7 ; too weak, though managed by an angel, as you may see in the ministry of the angel Gabriel to Zacharias, leading him to a particular faith, a business one would think of less difficulty, the circumstances considered, Luke i. 11, 19, 20.

Too weak, though managed by Christ himself. How little did his ministry prevail against the opposition of the unbelieving Jews! So little, as he complains: 'I have laboured in vain,' Isa. xlix. 4. Oh the wonderful power of unbelief! the incredible strength of this opposition! that the power of the word in the ministry of Christ himself, yea, the power of miracles, wherewith his ministry was enforced, could not prevail against it, John xii. 37, 38.

Nay, the power of God does not master it when it is put forth only in a common way; for a common concurrence is always vouchsafed; without that we cannot move nor breathe, yet we see unbelief is seldom overcome, this opposition to faith seldom mastered.

But the power of God, the almighty power of God, must be put forth in a special manner to prevail against this opposition. That almighty arm must be made bare, and stretched out; it must be put forth in the infiniteness of its strength, that a sinner may be made able or willing to believe, Isa. liii. 1; that the report of Christ may be believed, the arm of the Lord must be revealed, it must be made bare, Isa. lii. 10; alluding to the gesture of men, who setting themselves to some special work in good earnest, that they may use the force of it with less encumbrance, strip the arm up to the elbow. Such a power is required to raise sinners out of the grave of unbelief as was requisite to raise Christ from the dead. Thus the apostle pregnantly expresses it, Eph. i. 19, 20.

3. Impediment. A conceit that the terms of Christ are hard. This keeps off a sinner from closing with Christ as he is offered. Satan, who seeks by all means to hinder the match betwixt Christ and a sinful soul, he represents the conditions hard; and the heart, which is under the power of Satan's suggestions, does easily believe him. Oh, says he, if I accept of Christ as he is offered, I must leave my sins, I must be deprived of my ease, my former stolen pleasures, my former sweet delights; I must abandon such a course that has been so gainful, so advantageous to me, that which has upheld my credit and repute, that which has been such a solace, a refreshment to me; I must relinquish such a practice to which I have been so long accustomed, which is so endeared to me; Christ declares it offensive to him, he will not tolerate it; I must enter into that way which is so strait and holy, that path which seems so sad and melancholy, which is jeered and derided by others, and which has been so distasteful to me. Oh, this seems a hard saying, this keeps him off from giving his consent to Christ. He sees something desirable in Christ, he sees some reason to close with him, he sees some necessity of him, there is no salvation without him. Oh, but if he yield to Christ, his beloved sin, his Benjamin must go. This seems hard, he cannot yield to it, and so when Christ has been long treating with him in the ministry of the word, the match is broken upon this account; Christ stands upon too hard terms, thus he apprehends. This is the true cause why the ambassadors of Christ prevail so little in their treaty with sinners; the main cause why Christ being offered to so many, is accepted by so few. The greatest part do not like Christ's terms, they seem too strict, too hard.

It much concerns us therefore to endeavour the removing of this, it being the great stumbling-block, the great rock of offence upon which so many fall and split their souls. For this purpose consider,

(1.) The terms of Christ are easy, whatever Satan or a corrupt heart suggest to the contrary. 'They are as easy as possible can be, as easy as the nature of the matter can possibly admit of, as easy as can be desired

with any reason. They could not be easier without the greatest absurdity and contradiction imaginable. They are such as those who object against them would in a like case count them easy enough in all reason. Satan knows them to be so; and those wretched souls who are now damned for not accepting, without doubt do now acknowledge them easy and reasonable, though they would not see it till it was too late. That this may not prove the sad case of any of you, I will make it plain to you; so plain, as if any will not close with them, as they will certainly perish, so they will perish without all excuse. Suppose a man should offer to restore sight to another upon condition he would not wilfully shut his eyes, is it possible he should have his sight upon any other terms? Or could he desire his sight upon any easier terms? Would it not be absurd, unreasonable, impossible for him to desire to see, while he is resolved to shut his eyes? The case is like here; Christ offers to discover to a sinner the things that concern his peace, if he will not shut his eyes, if he will not give himself up to be blinded by Satan. He offers to discover himself to him, if he will not turn his back on Christ when he is presented to his view. Could he have this happy sight upon any other, upon any easier terms? Is it possible to have it upon other? Is it reasonable to desire it upon easier terms? A prince offers to adopt a man for his son, and to admit him to the state and privileges of a son, upon these terms, that he do not wilfully continue in the state of a slave. Could this be done upon other, upon easier, terms? The Lord offers to adopt a sinner for his son, to admit him into the state and privileges of that blessed sonship upon these terms, that he do not wilfully continue in the slavery of sin and the service of Satan. Now, can this be done upon any other easier terms? Are not these two states inconsistent? Is it not utterly impossible that a man should be in the state of a son and of a slave both at once? Is it not a plain contradiction? Would it not be absurd to desire it, to think of it? Christ offers to restore sinners to the glorious liberty of the sons of God, if they be but willing to leave their dungeon, to have their fetters knocked off. Is it possible they should have liberty while they are resolved to continue in their fetters? Your sins are your fetters; hence they are called the bonds of wickedness, the bond of iniquity. It is a most absurd contradiction, a most unreasonable thing, to desire to be at liberty and in fetters both at once. Can ye have liberty upon easier terms than to leave your fetters?

Christ offers to be reconciled to you, to delight in you, to make you beautiful and lovely, if you will but part with your leprosy, your deformity, sin, which makes you nasty and loathsome to him. Now, would you have Christ to be in love with deformity? Would you have him delight in that which is nasty and loathsome? Can any have beauty upon easier terms than to part with their leprosy, their deformity? Nay, is it possible to have it upon any other, upon any easier terms? Can Christ pardon you when you will not lay down your weapons? Or would you have him heal you while you will not part with your disease? Is not this a plain contradiction; to be cured, and not part with the disease?

If a physician should undertake to secure his patient's life in case he will not drink poison, is it possible he should do it otherwise? Why, sin is the poison of the soul; sinful words are called the poison of asps, sinful practices are called the poison of dragons, Deut. xxxii. 33. Now, Christ will secure the life of the sinner if he will not drink in this poison, if he will not drink in iniquity, &c. Would you not think him a madman that



would have life upon any other terms besides these terms? What, live and not leave this deadly poison!

Suppose a man having wandered from home and lost himself, should meet with one that would lead him home, but upon these terms, that he would leave that path which leads him directly further and further from it; would you not think him void of all sense and reason that would be brought home upon other terms, that would go backward and forward, north and south, at once? This is the case. The sinner has lost himself, lost his soul, lost heaven, lost the way to it. Christ meets the sinner, offers to bring him home, to bring him to heaven; but it is upon these terms, he must not still walk on in the path that leads directly to hell, for these lie quite contrary, as north and south. And are these terms hard? Or rather must not he bid defiance to all reason, that would think of coming to heaven upon any other terms? If a man were to make his own terms, would any be so ridiculous, so absurd, as to say, I will come to heaven in that way that leads directly to hell? Would you have Christ, by making other terms, to make himself more absurd, more ridiculous, than any man that has the use of reason would be? Oh, the unreasonableness of sin! the absurdness of a deluded soul! May not the Lord say, 'Are not my ways equal? O house of Israel, are not your ways unequal?' Could I have stooped lower to sinners? Could I have condescended further? Could I have devised terms more easy, more equal, for a sinner's happiness? Those whose hearts now quarrel with them, will hereafter be so confounded with the clear apprehensions of their equity, that they will be struck dumb and speechless when they shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, when he shall then demand why they refused him when offered upon terms so easy, so equal; the sense hereof will strike them dumb and silent. This is so clear as I doubt not but it is seen even in the darkness of hell. I question not but the apprehension does wound those damned souls with more anguish than any pang of death, when they remember that they refused Christ when he was offered upon such easy, such equal, terms.

This is the first consideration, the terms of Christ are easy. Not as easy is opposed to difficult, for there is difficulty therein to corrupt nature, but as it is opposed to that which is harsh, rigid, or unequal. So they are most easy.

(2.) The grounds upon which thou thinkest the terms of Christ to be hard, are false and delusive. He is a cheater that suggests them to thee; there is a design therein to cheat thee of heaven, to cozen thee of thy soul. Examine them a little, and this will be plain. If thou closest with Christ, says that deluder, thou lovest thy ease, thy pleasures, thy gains, thy friends and boon companions, &c. These are the grounds upon which Christ's terms are judged to be hard. Well, but inquire a little further, what ease, pleasures? Christ will abridge thee of no ease but that which is unlawful, of no pleasures but those that are impure and sinful, of no gain but that which is unjust and unrighteous, of no friends but those that are unworthy of the name of friends, those that are indeed enemies to Christ and thy soul. When all is cast up, if thou close with Christ, thou lovest no more than these by the bargain, and then thou lovest nothing that is worth the keeping. To lose these is indeed the greatest gain. Thou art lost, undone if thou quit them not. Would any man be loath to part with that which will undo him? Shall the match betwixt Christ and thy soul be broke upon such terms? Wilt thou judge Christ's terms hard

because he would have thee part with that which shall certainly and eternally ruin thee? Wilt thou break with him upon this? Wilt thou suffer thy soul to be thus cheated? Consider of it a little better, and view those things more distinctly, and do it seriously. Be mindful that I am by the appointment of Christ in a treaty with thee about thy soul, the issue of it will be life or death to thee for ever.

[1.] Thou art at ease now, neglecting thy soul, and [not] troubling thyself much about thy eternal estate. But if thou accept of Christ, this spiritual sloth must be shaken off. Now, thou art loath to forego thy ease, and art ready to forego Christ rather than thy ease. And is Christ indeed so little set by? Is thy soul of so small value with thee that thou wilt not trouble thyself about it? Well, but this is not the way to avoid trouble, this is not the way to enjoy thy lasting ease. Believe it, for it is certain truth, this ease will end in endless torments. Oh, that is a woeful ease that has such a woeful issue! Woe to them that be at ease! So soon as that fool in the gospel had said, 'Soul, take thy ease,' the tormentors take his soul; this night, Luke xii. 19. If thou break with Christ for thine ease, thou art no wiser than that fool, nor wilt thou fare any better. Torment for ease, intolerable torments for a little ease, eternal torments for a moment's ease! O foolish, deluded soul, wilt thou make such a bargain? wilt thou break with Christ for a little ease? Well, take heed thou dost not find it a 'little-ease' indeed when it will be too late to repent.

[2.] For sinful pleasures. Thou now eatest, drinkest, and art merry; carnal mirth and jollity is that which makes thy life desirable to thee. Thou givest the reins to thy sinful appetite, usest no curb to thy receptions.\* Thou singest away care, and drinkest away sorrow, and laughest at those that would restrain thee, or are so precise as not to follow thee in these excesses. Or if thy excesses be not open, yet there is some secret sin which thou hidest under thy tongue, and pleasest thyself with it as with a sweet morsel. There is some forbidden fruit or other on which thou feedest with much delight. Now if thou shouldst close with Christ, all the sport would be spoiled. And so it would indeed, so far as it is sinful, and in things unlawful, so far as it is immoderate and excessive in things lawful. And wilt thou break with Christ for this? Are sinful pleasures of more value with thee than Christ, than thy soul, than heaven, than life? It may be so, but then they are taken upon the devil's report. But will you behold them, and judge of them, as Christ represents them? Methinks those that profess themselves Christians should be as ready to believe the Spirit of Christ as the father of lies. Why, then, the pleasures of sin are worse than the bitterest affliction. The Spirit of God testifies that they were so to Moses, Heb. xi. 25. The bitterness of death is in the pleasures of sin, and they will prove such bitterness in the end. If Christ be put off for these, and the way of holiness declined as a sad, uncouth, melancholy path, that which is pleasant to the palate will be torture to the bowels, Rev. x. 9. Lazarus's sores and poverty is far better than a fulness of such delights; and so Christ propounds it in the parable, and so he found it who fared deliciously every day; being in torments, he could see it. 'And in hell,' says the text, 'he lift up his eyes.' He could see it then, though he would not see nor believe it before, Luke xvi. 23: 'Son, remember,' ver. 25. Oh that is a sharp memorandum; it cuts deep. Remember thou hadst thy pleasures. Thou hadst them; but

Qu. 'affections'?—Ed.

now they are gone, they are vanished; nothing remains but the remembrance of them; and this does more torture him than ever the enjoyment delighted him. Thou hadst thy pleasures. Oh, but what has he now? Why, now thou art tormented. Ay, thou art, and thou wilt be. This will be true in every moment of an endless eternity, thou art tormented. And as sure as these are the words of Christ, this will be thy condition, who wilt not quit thy sinful pleasures to close with Christ. Oh that you would now remember it, before the time come, when it will be too late to remember it, before you be in that place where it will be a hell to remember it. Have you not seen a distracted man skip, and dance, and laugh, and sing, as though he were the merriest man alive? But have you not, withal, pitied that mirth, as being the issue of madness and distraction? Such is the mirth of those who will not quit their sinful pleasures to follow Christ. It is the mirth of madmen; their jollity and pleasures are the acts of spiritual frenzy and distraction. It is said the prodigal 'came to himself' when he resolved to come to his father, when he was upon his return to Christ. Before, while he run in his way of pleasures, he was beside himself, Luke xv. 17. So is every sinner, till he leave all to return to Christ. He is beside himself, his mirth is but frenzy, his delights are the issues of distraction. Oh, lamentable mirth! If he knew his condition, it would soon damp all his joy; his laughter would be turned into mourning, and his joy into heaviness. But he is beside himself; and what clearer symptoms of madness than this? He will forego Christ rather than his pleasures.

[3.] Unlawful gain. Whether it be got in an ungodly way, by laying out those thoughts, that time, those endeavours, for the things of the world, which should be employed for the things of heaven; or whether it be got in an unrighteous way, by unjust or indirect courses in word or deed. Take the apostle's estimate of such gain, and then judge whether the relinquishing of this be any just ground for to count Christ's terms hard, James v. 1-3. To hoard up such gain is to hoard up sorrows; it is for a man to make a bed of thorns for himself, which will make him weep and howl, and pierce him through with many sorrows, to heap up racks, to heap up miseries. It is not a heap of precious things, but a mass of corruption. It is not a treasure, but a canker, a consuming rust, which will not only consume the rest of his substance, but himself, and that in a grievous manner, as with fire. This is gain with a witness; but it is such as will bear witness against him, and cast him in the day of judgment. Ye have heaped up, ye think ye have heaped up treasure; true, but it is a treasure of wrath, and so you will find it at the last day. Now sum up this together, and then judge whether you will lose anything by quitting this for Christ. Such gain is a hoard of sorrows, a heap of miseries, a mass of corruption, a consuming rust and canker, a devouring fire, a condemning witness; and, if this be not enough, a treasure of wrath. And will any man count it a loss to be rid of such a horrible evil as this? And are they not miserably cheated who will be persuaded to quit Christ rather than to quit such a dreadful mischief? This may be sufficient to clear this second consideration.

(8.) Christ will make up what you seem to lose by accepting him with real gains, and that in abundant measure, in a transcendent manner. Though, by closing with the terms of Christ, you lose nothing that is worthy the keeping, you lose nothing but what it is a gain to lose, as appears by the former consideration. Yet he will make up that seeming

loss with better things, such as are incomparably, unspeakably, inconceivably, infinitely better.

For carnal ease, you shall have spiritual rest; rest from the intolerable and cruel slavery of sin and Satan; rest from the troubles of a disquieting conscience, 'Come unto me,' &c., Mat. xi. 28; rest from the vexations of the world, 'In the world,' &c., John xvi. 33; eternal rest, 'There remains a rest for the people of God,' Heb. iv. 9; 'Blessed are they that die in the Lord; for they rest,' &c., Rev. xiv. 13.

For sinful pleasures, the comforts of the Holy Spirit, 'I will send the Comforter'; for fading pleasures, everlasting joy, Isaiah lxi. 7; for unsatisfying pleasures, satisfying delights: Ps. xxxvi. 8, 'abundantly satisfied'; for pleasures that are not worthy the name of pleasures, unspeakable joys; for impure pleasures, glorious joy, 1 Pet. i. 8; for embittered pleasures, fulness of joy; for the pleasures of mad men, the Master's joy, Mat. xxi. 21, John xv. 11; for the pleasures of sin, the joy of Christ.

Set these things together, and see if there be any comparison.

For unlawful gain, the riches of Christ's purchase; for uncertain riches, an inheritance immortal, undefiled, &c.; for riches on earth, treasures in heaven; for a little gain on earth, the unsearchable riches of Christ; for thorny pricking enjoyments, a rich crown of glory; for a little gain, that which is as good as nothing, that which amounts to no less than all things, 1 Cor. iii. 21-23, 'will I give to inherit all things.'

For carnal friends that ye may lose, the Lord will admit you into an inward friendship with himself, with his Son, with his Spirit, with the glorious angels, with the spirits of just men made perfect, with all that are excellent upon earth; such a friendship, as all together shall have one heart, and one spirit, and one interest, and one habitation; all these joined in one blessed league, to promote one interest, even that interest which is thine, and Christ the head of this league. Oh what is the league with death, the covenant with hell, the confederacy with the greatest carnal men on earth, to this league! Oh, if men be not wholly given over to the spirit of delusion, the terms of Christ will never be counted hard.

Compare the terms upon which you give up yourselves to sin and Satan, with the terms of Christ, and see then if they be hard. Till you accept of the terms of Christ, while you close with those of sin and Satan, what is your state, your employment, your reward? By these you may judge of Satan's terms.

As to your *state*, you are slaves, slaves and drudges to the vilest of creatures, to the most unmerciful tyrant in the world, 'led captive by Satan at his will,' at his lust.

Your *employment* is to fight against God, and to wound and destroy your own souls. This you do continually; you are slaves upon no better terms. Your lusts are weapons of unrighteousness, and Satan continually sets you on work thus to use these weapons against God, against your own souls. And lest sinners should be unwilling to do this, if they should see what they are doing, he puts out the eyes of these wretched slaves. He deals with you as the Philistines did with Samson when they had taken him captive, Judges xvi. 21.

And what *reward*, what encouragement, may they expect for this hard, intolerable service? Why, 'the wages of sin is death.' Here is all; when the poor sinner hath spent himself, soul and all, in their service, and comes to look for a reward, behold they put him to death. Here is no other reward for him but eternal death.

These are the terms upon which you serve sin and Satan. These are the terms which you count better than the terms of Christ. Christ's terms are hard, but these are easy to you. And is it so indeed? Or are not sinners blinded and bewitched, who call bitter sweet, and sweet bitter; darkness light, and light darkness; hard easy, and easy hard? If the Lord open your eyes, and undeceive you, this may be sufficient to remove the third impediment.

4. Impediment. Is a man's resting in his own righteousness. While a man rests in himself, he will never rest on Christ. While he stands upon anything in himself, he never rolls himself upon Christ. He will never rejoice alone, rely alone upon Christ Jesus, who has any confidence in the flesh. The apostle including his own righteousness in this word flesh, directly opposes these, Phil. iii.

But are there any such? Alas! nothing more common amongst the Jews, who professed so much confidence in the Messiah. Nothing is more ordinary now amongst those who profess that Christ is their only Saviour, than to neglect him, and rest on their own righteousness. How common is it for men to state their righteousness thus. They hear the word, desire the ordinances, pray in public and in private; they mean well, are charitable to those in want, deal honestly, do no man wrong, keep the commandments as well as ever they can, hope their hearts are as good as the best; fall into no great sins, or when they are overtaken with sin, they are sorry for it; and for this they trust that God will be merciful to them, and will save them, whatever become of outrageous sinners; for this they hope to find pardon, to procure acceptance with God; and here they rest, and ground their hopes of heaven.

Now this is one of Satan's strongest holds, whereby he keeps sinners safe and sure from coming to Christ. Against this did Christ and the apostles bend the force of their ministry. For you may see the apostle Paul in travail with this design, especially in his Epistle to the Romans and Galatians. He knew Christ would never be formed in them, till they were cured of this tympany, this false confidence and conceit of their own righteousness. Against this did Christ direct that parable of the Pharisee and Publican, Luke xviii. 9. This was the great stumbling-block of the Jews, upon which they fell and split their souls. Instead of resting on Christ, Rom. ix. 30-32, chap. x. 8, they placed and established their own righteousness in the outward conformity to the law; and because they did outwardly observe it, for this they concluded that God was pleased with them, would pardon, and bless, and save them. They thought this righteousness sufficient, stood upon it, and would not stoop to any other; submitted not to the righteousness of God, and so came short of the righteousness of faith, never attained it. Such a block was this in their way, as the Gentiles found righteousness sooner than they. The Publicans, who had no such thing to rest on, were more easily persuaded to cast themselves on Christ, than the confident Pharisees.

To remove this, let me shew how groundless and dangerous this is.

(1.) You have, as you suppose, some righteousness; but have you not withal some sin? You can recount several religious, charitable, righteous acts, but is there no one act of sin you are guilty of? I hope there is none so brutishly stupid, as to have such a thought. If this be acknowledged, then further ye may be assured, that all your supposed righteousness will not countervail one sin, and that either in reference to the honour of God, or to thy own salvation.

All thy righteousness does not so much honour God, as that one sin does dishonour him. He gets not so much by all thy righteousness, if it were far more than it is, as he loses by that sin. 'Heaven and earth shall pass away,' &c. So tender is the Lord of his law, as he had rather heaven and earth should pass away, than that this\* part of the law should be abolished. Now every sin would abolish that part of the law, against which it is directed; every sin would do that, which the Lord had rather heaven and earth should perish, than it should be done. And the Lord knows the tendency of it, and accordingly resents it. The injury that is in sin, considering against whom it is directed, is infinite; but no finite creature, no finite righteousness, can infinitely honour him. One sin will do more to condemn thee, than all thy other righteousness can do to save thee. For the least sin is such a wrong, a dishonour to God, as he cannot in justice admit the sinner into heaven, or into his favour, till he be satisfied for it. Now all thy other righteousness cannot satisfy the Lord for that one sin; nay, all the righteousness of men and angels cannot make amends for that one sin. For when they are perfectly righteous, they are no more than they ought to be; they do no more than they owe, therefore they cannot thereby satisfy for that one sin. For the payment of one debt does not discharge another.

So then, all thy righteousness vanishes at the appearance but of one sin. One sin renders all thy other righteous acts unavailable to salvation. What then will it do, when thou art guilty of many millions of sins? If one sin will dash all thy righteousness out of countenance, and quite deface it; where will it appear before so many swarms of sins, as the Lord may charge thee with? Alas, poor deluded sinner, thou leanest upon a shadow, a shadow already vanished, when thou retest on thy own righteousness.

(2.) The righteousness that you rest upon is no righteousness; and therefore when you rest upon it you rest upon nothing: you hang the weight of salvation and your souls upon nothing.

This will appear if you grant but that one supposition, which every one but he that is stark blind will acknowledge. Grant but that you are guilty of one sin, and the apostle will thence infer that you are guilty of all, James ii. 10. The parts of the law are so linked together, that he who transgresseth one part thereof, does in some way and degree or other transgress the whole law. Now, he that is a righteous man is an observer of the law; therefore, he that is a transgressor of it is not righteous, and consequently has no righteousness, except in his deluded fancy and imagination. What righteousness has he then, who continually transgresses the rule, who seldom or never observes it as far as he can, who, to be sure, never observes it as far as he ought? And is not this your case? And does not every one see it, whose mind the God of this world has not blinded? The church's acknowledgment is observable, Isa. lxiv. 6. We have no more righteousness to rest in but what is indeed no righteousness at all, no more than filthy rags are clean.

Farther, that observance of the rule of righteousness which is not done in a due manner, and for sincere ends, is no part of that righteousness which is according to law. That which is not done in a due manner, wants the form, is but the carcase of a righteous act, wants that which is the soul of it, and therefore is no more a righteous act than that lump of flesh is a man, which wants a reasonable soul.

\* Qu. 'the least'?—Ed.

And that which is done out of sinister respects is not a righteous act, but an act of hypocrisy. Now whosoever rests in his own righteousness, he never did anything in a due manner, never anything with a sincere aim ; and therefore, how confident soever he is of his righteousness, the truth is, he never did any righteous act in his life ; and so when he rests upon his righteousness, he rests upon that which he never had, upon nothing, upon that which is not, nor ever was in being.

Moreover, there is no righteousness but either that which is legal or evangelical ; but this self-confident has neither. Legal righteousness he has none ; indeed, there is none now in the world ; for the law acknowledges no righteousness but that which is absolutely perfect. And he is not only without righteousness, but without sense and reason, that will arrogate to himself such a perfection.

Nor has he any evangelical righteousness ; for that is the righteousness of God, of Christ, of faith, as the Holy Ghost calls it. But he that rests in his own righteousness has none of these ; for his own righteousness is not the righteousness of God, nor of Christ, nor of faith. Nay, by resting on his own, he makes himself altogether incapable of this righteousness ; that must be renounced before this can be received, as the apostle shews by his own practice, Philip. iii. ; so that the righteousness which he rests on is no righteousness that the Scripture will acknowledge, and therefore none at all ; so that trusting to this, thou trustest upon nothing, layest the stress of thy soul and salvation upon nothing.

(8.) Inquire a little farther, and we shall discover the righteousness which men rest on is indeed unrighteousness ; that seeming righteousness which they rest on is really unrighteousness. That this may be evident, take notice that the righteousness of a self-confident is made up of acts which he conceives to be righteous. Now acts are specified by their end, a true rule in morality, which holds true in divinity. It is the end that gives both name and nature to the act. If the end be not good, the act, whatever the matter of it be, is stark naught. If the end be ungodly, the act is ungodly, though for the matter it be one of the highest acts of divine worship. If the end be unrighteous, the act is unrighteous, though for the matter it be one of the highest acts of justice. Now he that rests in his own righteousness is an unbeliever, and he that is an unbeliever has no good principles, his heart is not purified, his mind and conscience is defiled, Titus i. 15. Now he that has no good principle can have no good end in anything that he does. An unholy heart cannot have an holy end, for the streams rise no higher than the spring. The fruit can be no better than the tree. It is Christ's own reasoning, Mat. vii. 15-17. Then, since his end cannot be good and righteous, it must be evil and unrighteous ; for there is no medium, no third thing in this case. And his end being unrighteous in all his acts, all his acts must needs be unrighteous, so that the righteousness which he rests on is all of it unrighteousness. It is a plain case ; all the ends and purposes of these self-confidents are perverse and wicked, and tend some way or other to the promoting (though they will not discern it) of some other iniquity, so that the acts of righteousness which they rest on, when they are sifted, will be found no better than instruments of iniquity, weapons of unrighteousness. To conclude then, that which they rest on under the notion of righteousness is really and indeed unrighteousness. The matter, when it is searched to the bottom, appears to be this : they trust that for their righteousness God will accept them, be well pleased with them, and admit them into heaven. Now, whether

this be a greater madness or a greater wickedness is not easy to determine ; sure it is in a high degree both.

(4.) Those that trust in their own righteousness are enemies to all righteousness. Their righteousness is not only no righteousness, it is not only unrighteousness, but their resting on it bears upon it the brand of an high enmity against all that is righteous. They are enemies to the righteousness of God, of Christ, of the law, of the gospel.

If you rest in your own righteousness, you are enemies to the righteousness of God ; for the righteousness of God consists principally in his truth and justice. Now this confidence rises up against both, for his truth is engaged that no man shall come to heaven without a righteousness that can satisfy his justice, and justice has declared that it will not be satisfied with any imperfect, sinful righteousness. Yet this self-confident believes and rests on it, that his own righteousness will please and satisfy God, and that, however it appear to be sinful and unrighteous, it will make his way to heaven notwithstanding, so that to trust in this is indeed to trust that God is unrighteous, that God is no God ; for he is no God if he be not true and just, if he be not a righteous God, and he is not righteous if he be not true and just.

If you rest in your own righteousness, you are enemies to the righteousness of Christ. This confidence in self-righteousness thrusts Christ's righteousness out of doors, leaves no place for it, no use of it. It counts the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, a thing of no use or value ; tramples upon the blood of Christ as an useless, a fruitless thing ; counts Christ to have done and suffered so many things in vain, Gal. ii. 21. Now the self-confident says he has a righteousness that comes by the law, by some outward works and acts which the law requires ; places his righteousness in some outward observance of and conformities to the law, and so would make Christ to have died in vain ; for why did he die, but that lost man might have a righteousness to bring him to heaven ? If men have this in themselves, Christ's undertaking, and his sufferings too, were vain and needless. In vain did he take upon him 'the form of a servant,' in vain was he 'made under the law,' in vain did he 'fulfil all righteousness,' in vain did he become a 'man of sorrow,' in vain did he bear the wrath of God, in vain was he wounded, scourged, and crucified. All this was needless and waste if men have a righteousness of their own to be rested on. Oh, what a horrid reflection does this cast upon Christ ! What a monstrous provocation is this ! No imagination can fathom the depth of it.

If you rest on your own righteousness, you are enemies to the righteousness both of the law and of the gospel, for by thus doing, you give the lie to both. The law says, there is no life to be had without perfect obedience ; the self-confident says, he shall have life, though he have neither such an obedience, nor faith to be justified from the defects of it. The law says, 'Cursed is every one that continues not in all things,' &c., Gal. iii. 10 ; he says, he shall be blessed, though he continue not in all things, no, nor any thing, as it is prescribed in the law, though he rest not only upon him who only can free a sinner from the curse.

It gives lie to the gospel too ; for that says, 'By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.' But he says, he shall be accepted for his works, for his righteous acts, and his observance of the law therein. The gospel says, no sinner shall come to heaven but by the righteousness of Christ, the righteousness of faith : he trusts he shall find acceptance and life for his own righteousness. See here what it is to rest in your own righteous-



ness. View it in its own colours, and then judge whether it be not a horrid provocation, since it is no better than this when unmasked, than to trust he shall have acceptance and life, and procure it by such a horrible wickedness, as this appears to be. If there be any fear of God, any respect to Christ, any regard to your own souls, let this consideration fright you from resting on any righteousness of your own.

Thus much for the removing of the impediments, which keep insensible sinners from believing.

I now proceed to answer those objections which are ordinarily made by sensible sinners; those that are convinced of their sin and misery, who are apprehensive of the weight and burden of sin and wrath; who not only see, but feel an absolute necessity of Christ; who highly value Christ, and prefer him above all; and whose souls are drawn out in strong and restless desires after him. These are they indeed whom Christ invites to come to him, and rest their weary souls on him. But several discouragements there are ordinarily cast in their way by Satan and unbelief, which hinder them from complying with Christ, and closing with the promise. These I shall endeavour to remove, but briefly; because, considering how small the number is of humbled and awakened souls, in comparison of these who are secure and insensible, I fear it will not be so generally seasonable. Some few I shall touch on.

1. One objection wherein humbled souls are ordinarily entangled is drawn from election. Oh, says the soul, I fear I am not elected; and then what ground have I to believe in Christ, to rest on him for pardon and life? Faith is peculiar to chosen vessels, it is called 'the faith of God's elect.' If I knew that I belonged to the election of grace, then I might believe indeed; but till then, I cannot, I dare not; till then, I cannot think that Christ or the promise belongs to me. To this I answer,

(1.) It is impossible to know election before faith; therefore to desire this, is to go about to compass impossibilities. This was never done, nor ever will be. If this had been stood upon, there had been no faith in the world, no soul had ever believed in Christ; for it is not possible for any to know he is elected till he believe. This is to desire to see thy name is writ in the book of life, written in heaven, before thou hast an eye to see it. It is the eye of faith that only sees this, that alone can read this; it is impossible you should see it without an eye, without this eye.

It is impossible you should read this in the book of life till that book be opened; now it is a book shut and sealed till faith open it. Election is a secret, it runs under ground till faith. When the soul believes, then it first breaks forth; then, and not till then, is this secret made known and brought to light. When you desire assurance of it before, you desire to know that which cannot be known, to see that which cannot be discerned.

(2.) It is preposterous. To attempt this, is to set the cart before the horse, to desire to be at the end before ye are in the way; as if a man would be at a good distance from him,\* before he set a foot out of his own door: as if the Israelites would have been in Canaan, that pleasant land, before they were come out of Egypt.

This is to have a conclusion proved without any premises, without any good medium to prove it by. You must first have the ground and medium before you can reason and draw the conclusion. If ever you would conclude on good ground that you are elected, faith must be the ground on which you must conclude it. I believe, therefore, I am elected; that is

\* Qu. 'home'?—Ed.

the method wherein the Lord would have you reason. First, make that sure, I believe; and then this conclusion will be easy and certain, I am elected. This is the apostle's method, 1 Thes. i. 4, first the work of faith, and then the election of God.

The work of a sinner's salvation is like Jacob's ladder; it reaches from earth to heaven, and so has many rounds: the highest round is election, that is as high as heaven; the lowest round is faith, that is on earth. Now would ye be at the highest round before you have set foot on the lowest step? No; be not unreasonable, invert not the order that God has set. If you would get up to this great height, and mount this heavenly ladder, begin at the bottom; begin at faith, that is the lowest step, and so you will ascend by degrees towards election, the knowledge and assurance of it.

(3.) It is impertinent to trouble thyself about this. It is a secret, and so the Lord will keep it till thou believest. It is not his will that it should be known to any before faith. To inquire into it before is to pry into God's secrets. Indeed, if a man were certain that he were not elected it were another case, but as it is not certain that thou art elected, so it is not certain that thou art not elected. Thou hast no means to know either the one or the other till faith certainly; till then the Lord reserves it in his own breast as a secret. Now 'secret things belong to God,' Deut. xxix. 29. The Lord shews here what belongs to him, and what belongs to us, that we should mind our duty, and not busy ourselves with impertinencies. Whether thou art elected or no at this time is a secret which the Lord never discloses to an unbeliever, and therefore till faith it belongs not to thee. But that thou shouldst believe is no secret; that is a revealed duty; the law, the gospel enjoins it. The law of faith is a known law; this is it which belongs to thee, to do all the words of the law. Thou wilt not believe, lest it should be too much boldness, being uncertain whether thou art elected; but is it not a greater boldness to pry into God's secrets? Thou thinkest it would be presumption to believe, though God reveals it to be his will; but is it not greater presumption to inquire into that which it is his will thou shouldst not know?

Observe the apostle's order, 2 Pet. i. 10. Both belong to thee, but not both together, but one after the other, as the Holy Ghost has placed them. First make thy calling sure: till then it belongs not to thee to seek assurance of election; till then thou wilt seek in vain, never find it. The duty that lies upon thee, and which must first be looked to, is to make sure thy calling. The Lord calls thee now to believe; answer his call by believing, and so thy calling will be sure. This being assured, thou art in the highway to assure thy election. Thy diligence will not miscarry, because thou takest the way, and followest the method that God prescribes thee. But to follow thy own way, and give diligence in that which belongs not to thee, is not the way to prosper. Believe in the Lord, and so shalt thou prosper; but unless thou believest, thou wilt never be established as to thy election.

(4.) You think it needless, unreasonable, to pry into God's decrees before you apply yourselves to other undertakings; and it is as unreasonable here. When you are dangerously sick, and the physician tells you unless you take such a course of physic, your case is desperate, do ye use to reason thus: If I knew that God had decreed my recovery, I would take that course that is so like to restore me; but till I know that God has decreed my recovery, I'll take nothing. Sure we should think such a reasoner not only sick, but distracted. Thus it is here. The sinner is ready to perish; apply thyself to Christ, says the Lord, cast thyself on him, apply the promise; there is

no other way to save thy life. Oh, says he, if I knew the Lord had decreed my salvation, I would venture on Christ ; but till I know this, I must not believe. Oh the unreasonableness of unbelief ! Satan's suggestions make poor creatures act as though they were distracted. This is as if an Israelite, stung with the fiery serpent, should have said, If I knew that the Lord had decreed my cure, I would look upon the brazen serpent ; but till I know this, though there be no other way to save my life, I will not look on it. If all the stung Israelites had been thus resolved, it is like they had all perished.

Or as if one pursued by the avenger of blood, should have set him down in the way to the city of refuge, when he should have been flying for his life, and said, If I knew that the Lord had decreed my escape, I would make haste for refuge ; but till I know this, I will not stir, till I die for it. Would not this be counted a wilful casting away his life, with a neglect of that provision which God had made to save it ? Was it not sufficient that a way was made for his escape, and a way feasible enough, the city of refuge always open ? Even so are the arms of Christ always open to receive a humbled, distressed, perishing sinner flying to him for refuge. And wilt thou destroy thyself, by suffering Satan to entangle thee with a needless, impertinent, and unreasonable scruple ? If there be no way but one, and any encouraging probability to draw men into it, they fly into it without delay, never perplexing themselves with the decrees and secrets of God. This is thy case, Christ is thy way ; there is no way but this one, fly to it as for thy life ; and let not Satan hinder thee, by diverting thee to impossibilities and impertinencies. Do thus, and prosper. When the disciples were inquiring after an impertinent secret, Acts i. 6, 7, Christ takes them off, and directs them to the duty that then lay upon them : ' It is not for you to know,' &c.

*Obj.* 2. Oh but I am unworthy to come near Christ, unworthy to have anything to do with the promise. Will Christ entertain such an unworthy wretch as I am ? I have not only no merit, but no motive, nothing to engage, nothing but what may disoblige him, most highly engage him against me. Oh the sense of my unworthiness sinks my heart, and does utterly discourage me.

*Ans.* 1. Christ never excluded any upon this account, because they were unworthy. Christ never laid this as a bar to keep thee out ; why shouldst thou make use of it to bar thyself out ? He has always shewed himself ready to entertain a humbled returning sinner, how unworthy soever. Christ makes this no exception ; why dost thou make it one ? He never spoke word of discouragement to this, and why dost thou make it a discouragement ? Who more unworthy than the prodigal, either really, or in his own apprehension ? How unworthy he was really, you may see in the former part of the parable ; how unworthy in his own apprehension, you may see by his own expression. Yet does not this hinder him from returning, nor did it hinder the father (who there represents Christ) from receiving and embracing him. When he returns, filled with shame and sorrow, burdened with the sense of his former unworthy carriage, see how freely, how affectionately, how joyfully he entertains him. See it, and never let the thought of unworthiness discourage thee more. Methinks the sad heart of a humble, dejected sinner should revive and leap within him to see this affectionate passage. When this worthless wretch is afar off, he runs and meets him ; when he comes at him, he falls about his neck and kisses him ; when he has brought him home, he has the kindest entertainment that love

can make him, thinks nothing too dear, nothing too good to welcome him, who in the mean time is thinking nothing so vile, nothing so bad, so base and unworthy, as himself. He rejoices in him as one would do who receives a dear child from the dead. He rejoices himself, and he calls heaven and earth to rejoice with him. Oh see here the tender compassions, the wonderful kindness, the overflowing affections of Christ to the unworthiest of sinners, when he does but really return to him. As sure as that parable is Christ's, so sure will this be thy welcome, thy entertainment, poor dejected soul, if thou wilt but return to him. Thou hast unworthy thoughts of Christ, if the thoughts of thy unworthiness do discourage thee from coming to him. Will that hinder Christ from receiving thee, that never hindered him from admitting any?

*Ans. 2.* None that were worthy did ever believe. None such ever came to Christ, nor did Christ ever receive any such; and wilt thou have that before thou believest, which none ever could have? There are none, there never were any, really worthy; and those that think themselves worthy, will not believe, cannot cast themselves on Christ; or if they should come, yet would not Christ receive such. It is not his way, it stands not with his honour. Look over all those thousands or millions that have trusted in Christ, thou canst not find one amongst them all that were worthy. If thou canst find any thing in them that will bear the name of worth, they brought it not to Christ, but received it from him; they had it not before faith, but received it by faith. And wilt thou be such a one before thou believest, as never any one will be after thee? If none had believed but those that were worthy, there had never been a believer in the world, there had been no faith on earth, there had been no soul in heaven. And wilt thou be such a one as neither heaven nor earth will afford? If thou wilt never believe till thou art worthy, thou wilt never believe while thou hast a being. If thou must either believe while thou art unworthy, or not at all, why does unworthiness hinder thee, unless thou intendest to continue in unbelief for ever?

Oh it is true, you will say, none are worthy, all are unworthy! but I am more unworthy than any, there is none like me for that. Well, suppose this were true, which is not so likely, yet consider,

*Ans. 8.* It is most for Christ's honour to receive those which are most unworthy. It suits best with his greatest and dearest design; it tends most to promote that which he most aims at, when he graciously receives those that are most unworthy. And therefore thy unworthiness should not discourage thee, nay, it should rather encourage. For will not Christ do that freely, which most advances his own great and glorious design? You doubt not but an intelligent man will do that freely, which is most for his own interest. Why, it is the interest of Christ to receive those that are most unworthy; and will he not freely do it? Do ye think he does not know his interest? Will ye make him more ignorant than the sons of men? Or do ye think he will neglect his interest? Can he be guilty of negligence? To make unworthiness a discouragement, accuses Christ of both, casts those unworthy reflections of ignorance or negligence. Sure to do thus, is as great an unworthiness, as that which you object. Though you be worthy to be neglected, yet sure Christ will not neglect himself, his own great design and interest. This is Christ's design in admitting sinners, to make his freeness and riches of his grace most conspicuous, to make his grace glorious, Eph. i. 10-12; ii. 7-9. This is his counsel, his purpose, his design, his interest; to shew the exceeding riches of his grace. Now

grace is most rich, grace is most grace, when it is most free. That is plain to any who understand what grace is ; and grace is most free when it is shewed to those that are most unworthy, those who have nothing in the world to boast of. Then it appears in its lively colours, then it shines forth in the riches of its glory. Well, then, thou art unworthy, thou art most unworthy ; thou art greatly afflicted, deeply humbled under the sense of thy utter unworthiness ; and does this discourage thee from coming to Christ ? Dost thou think for this he will reject thee ? Why, thou art the person in whom, above others, Christ may meet with that which he most aims at ; thou art he on whom Christ may make himself, his grace, most glorious. Thou art the fittest subject for Christ to accomplish his great design on. And why ? Because thou art, and art sensible thou art, most unworthy. Lo here, that which thou objectest as a discouragement to keep thee from him, from believing in him, proves a great encouragement to hasten thee to him.

*Ans. 4.* Christ, in pursuance of his gracious design, does, as it were, pick out those that are most unworthy. Who is more worth ? he that can bring money and a price, something of worth to Christ ; or those that have nothing ? Now Christ will have those to come that have nothing, Isa. lv. 1. Who are worthy ? Those that are rich and full, or those that are hungry and empty ? Why, these will Christ choose, while he rejects the other : ' He fills the hungry,' &c. Who are more worthy, the righteous or sinners ? Why, Christ calls the unworthiest of these : ' He came not to call the righteous, but sinners,' &c. Who are more worthy, the wise or the foolish ? the mighty or the weak ? the noble and honourable, or the base and despised ? those that are something or those that are nothing ? Why, Christ pitches most on the more unworthy, 1 Cor. i. 26-28. If thou wouldst be more worthy, thou wouldst be among those whom Christ is wont to reject or pass by ; while thou art more unworthy in thy own apprehension, thou art one of those whom Christ is wont to choose and pick out for himself. And is unworthiness a discouragement ? Thou hast more encouragement now than thou wouldst have, if thou wert in thy own sense more worthy.

*Ans. 5.* Unworthiness does rather qualify you for Christ than otherwise, and therefore should rather encourage you to come to him than keep you from him. The Jews plead ill for the centurion, when they allege that he was worthy, Luke vii. 4. He pleads better for himself, and there is more truth, more ingenuity in his plea, that wherewith Christ is more taken, ver. 6, 7 ; not worthy that Christ should come to him, not worthy he should come to Christ. But does he fare worse for this ? No ; he obtains all that he desires, and a transcendent commendation besides. No subjects so capable of Christ and his benefits as unworthy creatures ; not only in reference to Christ's honour, of which before, but in respect of their necessities, those that render them unworthy. If they were not such, they were not in such a capacity of a Saviour. Are you such in a spiritual sense, as you find Luke xiv. 21 ? Why, these are they whom God invites to the marriage of his Son. Are you in Laodicea's state ? a condition unworthy enough, Rev. iii. 15. Why, Christ offers the riches and treasures of his purchase unto such, ver. 18. None else are so capable of them. Art thou poor, afflicted with thy soul-poverty ? Why, who else should Christ enrich but such ? His treasures would be slighted by, and thrown away upon others. Art thou blind, afflicted with that darkness that covers thy soul ? Who else should Christ restore to light but such ? His eye-salve others

will count needless. Art thou naked? Hast nothing to hide thy soul defilements, nothing to cover the shame of thy inward nakedness? Why, who else should Christ clothe but the naked? The white raiment will be useless to others. Art thou halt and maimed, thy soul out of joint, and discomposed? Why, who else should Christ cure but the maimed? The more desperate thy case seems to be, the more will it be for his credit and honour to undertake and effect the cure. The whole need not the physician, but the sick. Art thou wretched and miserable? Who else should Christ enhappy but those that are miserable? Art thou sinful, exceeding sinful, ashamed, grieved, burdened with thy sinfulness? Why, who else should Christ pardon but sinners? Art thou over-spread with soul-pollution? Who else should the blood of Christ cleanse but those that are polluted? For whom was the fountain opened? Art thou empty? Who else should Christ fill but the empty? To what end else did it please the Father that in him should all fulness dwell? Can he fill those who are full already? Are they capable of it? Art thou lost indeed, and in thy own sense? Who else should Christ seek but those that are lost? Should he seek those that never went astray? He came to seek them that were lost. Art thou a captive to sin, to Satan, weary of it, groanest under it? Who else should Christ redeem but the captives? Art thou nothing, less, worse than nothing, in thy own apprehension? To whom else should Christ be all in all? To whom else can he be so? Can he be all in all to those who are something in themselves?

Take a view of whatever makes thee worthy\* in thy own apprehension; and being sensible of it, afflicted with it, and it renders thee more capable of Christ; so far is it from being a discouragement to keep thee from him.

*Ans. 6.* To believe is not only a privilege, but a duty. (*Vid.* Sermon on James.†)

*Ans. 7.* The longer you continue in unbelief, the more unworthy you will be to come at Christ. Whatever tends to make you unworthy is hereby increased. Is it hardness of heart? Your hearts will be daily more and more hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Is it inability to be serviceable to Christ? You will be every day more unfit, more unable to do him service. Sin is every day wounding and weakening your souls. You lose time too, wherein you might do him much service, you lose both ability and opportunities. Is it sinfulness? You will grow every day more and more sinful. Is it the defilement and loathsome pollution of your hearts? Your souls will every day grow more and more loathsome; no stepping out of that puddle of sin, till you come out to Christ. You will still wallow more and more in it till you believe, still more besmear yourselves with that which renders you loathsome and hateful in the eye of Christ. Is it the multitude of your sins? You will find them grow more and more numerous; that horrid heap will rise higher and higher, swell bigger and bigger. Is it the heinousness and grievousness of your sins? Till you believe, they every moment grow more and more heinous, more provoking. They cry louder and louder to the Lord against you. You add to them more unbelief, which has in it a peculiar provocation above the rest.

If you be unworthy now, you will be much more unworthy hereafter. If it discourage you now, it will much more discourage you when it is greater; so that if you believe not now, it is like you may never believe. If you leap not over this discouragement, when it is but as a mole-hill in com-

\* Qu. 'unworthy'?—Ed.

† On James i. 6; the next Sermon but one.—Ed.

parison, how will you get over it when it is grown into a mountain? If you now suffer yourselves to be carried down with this stream, how will you get up it, when the waters of it are swelled higher and higher, and break in upon you with greater violence? It is most unreasonable to let unworthiness discourage you now from believing, unless you never intend to believe; for you will never be less unworthy.

If a man were to wade through a river, or die for it, he would enter it when it is lowest; for when he still sees it rising higher and higher, the longer he stays the more he may be afraid to venture. The water, which is but to the knees now, may be above his height in a little time. So here thy unworthiness is now at the lowest that ever it will be; thy life lies on it to believe on Christ. The longer thou stayest, the deeper, the larger will thy unworthiness grow. If thou beest not careless of thy life, venture now.

*Ans.* 8. Unbelief is the greatest unworthiness, the most provoking, that which seals thee up under all former unworthiness, binds it all upon thee, that which adds a new aggravation to all; not only incenses justice, but refuses mercy. It is the only excluding unworthiness.

*Ans.* 9. The Lord requires no other worthiness of thee but faith, nothing but a cordial acceptance of Christ as he is offered. He that hath this, the Lord will no more question him for his unworthiness, than the Lord's own goodness and faithfulness can be questioned.

*Obj.* 1. But I am not prepared for Christ; I am not sufficiently humbled, I have not had experience of the work of the spirit of bondage as others have. I never was so deeply afflicted with the apprehensions of God's wrath; nor have I had such terrors of conscience as are usual in others when the Lord is bringing them to Christ.

*Ans.* 8. It may be you lay more stress upon those terrors and legal humblings than is requisite. To prevent miscarriages, and remove mistakes herein, which seem to be the grounds of the objection (observe) that you may form right apprehensions of this matter, before which this scruple will fall.

(1.) Legal terrors are no parts of faith or conversion; they are neither essential nor integral parts. Those are essential parts which make up the essence of a thing, as soul and body are the essential parts of a man. Those are integral parts which make up the entirety of a thing, as the several members are integral parts of a man's body.

Those parts which give the essence to a thing begin with it, and continue with it while it is in being, but these terrors cease as soon as faith begins, and so they are no essential parts. A thing cannot be complete and entire without its integrals; the body, when it wants some members, is lame, or maimed, or defective; but faith may be entire and complete without these; it is not the more defective when these are gone and vanished; so they are not integrals. They are so far from being parts, as they are no degrees of faith; though some step to it, yet not the least degree of it. As the dryness of wood is no degree of heat or fire which kindles the wood, though it tend something to make it kindle more easily; so these, though they may something dispose a man towards faith, yet they are not any degree of faith. The least degree of true faith is saving, but these humblings may be in those who shall never be saved.

(2.) They are no causes of faith; no efficient causes to produce faith; nor subservient causes, by which alone the Lord does immediately produce it; nor moving causes, which oblige the Lord to work it.

They are not efficient causes which work faith, or have any virtue in themselves to effect it. The mere pulling off the gloves does not make clean the hands, there must be a farther act to do that, they must be washed. Those are but as the pulling off the gloves, something by way of preparation, but no causes that will do the work. And as they are no causes of faith in themselves, so the Lord does not work faith by these only, nor by these as the next and proper means. These are wrought by the law, faith is wrought by the gospel; that is the means by which the Lord produces faith; not the law, nor any effect of the law. The Spirit of Christ begets faith, not as a spirit of bondage, but as a sanctifying Spirit. Unless this regenerating Spirit proceed to a farther work, those legal humblings will be vain and fruitless.

Nor are they moving causes, such as engage or induce the Lord to bestow faith. When these terrors are in the highest degree, the Lord remains free whether he will give faith or no, and we see his proceedings are answerable. Sometimes he bestows it, sometimes he denies; but if these laid any engagement upon him, he could never deny faith to any who are once under the spirit of bondage; for the Lord will answer all engagements.

(8.) These are no conditions of any promise. The Lord has not promised faith, or any grace, to these legal preparations; so that as these cannot engage him to give faith, so he has not engaged himself thereto. There needs no proof of this, because no such promise can be produced. But the ground hereof is clear; for those who have gone no farther than these legal humblings are yet in a state of nature, and these preparatory works are common to reprobates. Now the Lord promises no grace to nature, nor to any thing that can be found in a mere natural man; no such thing is ever made the condition of any promise: otherwise the Lord could not deny grace to reprobates, could not deny faith to vessels of wrath, without the forfeiture of his truth and faithfulness; for where the condition is found, to him the promise must be accomplished, the truth and faithfulness of God requires it. Nothing which can be found in castaways can be the condition of a gracious promise; but these terrors may be found in a high degree in reprobates and mere natural men, *ergo*, &c.

(4.) These are not necessary antecedents of faith, though they be usually antecedents of faith, yet not necessarily; though they ordinarily go before faith, yet not always. It is possible some may have faith without these, and so it is possible a man may be fit for Christ who never had them. There is no place for legal terrors in infancy; yet that some have been sanctified from the womb we have some instances in Scripture. And though it be denied that infants are capable of actual faith, yet few or none deny but that age is capable of the habit or principle of faith. So that the Lord may prepare some for Christ in another way than this of legal terrors, though this be the usual way; and therefore they are not necessary indispensable antecedents of faith, though they be the ordinary way to it.

Hence it follows that, as he who finds in himself undoubted effects and evidences of faith need not question the truth of his faith for want of legal humiliation, so he that finds in himself the clear evidences of a preparedness for Christ, need not be discouraged from coming to him for want of these legal terrors, because these do not always go before faith, at least in the same degree with it.

(5.) Though these legal humblings do ordinarily go before faith, yet there is a great variety both as to the measure and continuance. All have not alike as to the time they are under them, some have a quicker passage



to Christ. All have them not in the like degree, in the height and depth of them; some have an easier passage to Christ than others. We find not that Zaccheus and Lydia were so deeply humbled, so much terrified, as Saul and the jailor. When good education prevents those gross enormities which are the occasions of those strong convulsions of conscience; or when the Lord begins to work in younger years, when sin is not so ripe nor so deeply riveted in the sinner by custom; or when wrath and mercy, misery and a redeemer, are both propounded together; there is many times some abatement of terror in these cases. And the Lord, who is a most free agent, and works how and in what manner he pleases, may make some abatement thereof in other cases, upon such reasons, and for such ends, as our shallowness cannot sound. That degree of humbling which is sufficient for some may not be enough for others. And that which is too little for one may be too much for another; his temper may not bear it, his case may not require it. That degree may fit one for Christ which will not so much as move another. And therefore you cannot upon any ground conclude that you are not prepared for Christ because you are not afflicted with such a degree of terror as you may meet with in some others; a threatening word, a light apprehension of wrath, may fright some out of their ways of sin, which others will not leave till they be fired out.

(6.) You must not judge of your preparedness for Christ by the depth of your humblings or the height of your terrors, but by the effects thereof. Judge of your fitness for Christ by those things wherein this fitness consists, that is a sure way, not by those things which are accidental to it and separable from it, as this or that degree of legal humiliation may be; to judge by these is the way to mistake. Inquire not how much or how long you have been under the spirit of bondage, but what is the issue of it, what is the end, and how much thereof is hereby attained. The end of those legal humblings is to fit you for Christ, they are but means used for this end. If the end be attained, the means are no farther necessary nor desirable. Whether more or less of those means have been applied, if you be prepared for Christ by that measure of humiliation you are under, be it more or be it less, no more is necessary or desirable, because the end of these means is attained. He is an unreasonable patient that will have more physic than is requisite for his health, a strange person that will have the chirurgeons to lance and scarify or cauterise him more than is necessary for the cure of his wound. If you be fit for Christ it is enough, how little soever your humblings have been.

Oh, but how shall this be known, whether I be fit for Christ? Why, it is best known by those things wherein this fitness consists. They are such as these; I will but name them.

(1.) He that is brought off from all dependence on himself and his own righteousness, so as to see and feel an absolute necessity of Christ.

(2.) He that is fallen out with every sin, so as to hate that which he has formerly most loved, and resolved to pursue every lust to the death.

(8.) He that hungers and thirsts after Christ, so as to be ready and willing to part with all for him.

(4.) He that is in love with holiness, purity of heart and life, so as he is heartily willing to comply with Christ in all his ways, even in those that are most strait and holy. He that, upon a faithful and impartial search, and observance of his heart, finds that he is truly and indeed brought thus far, whatever his humiliation have been, he is sufficiently prepared for Christ.

If this be thy case, thou hast no more ground (for want of legal humblings) to be discouraged from coming to Christ, and resting on him for pardon and life, than those who are already clasped in his everlasting arms.

*Obj.* Oh, but Christ does only heal the broken-hearted; he has comfort indeed, but it is only for the mourners. Now, alas! my heart is hard, it is a heart of stone; I find not that softness, that tenderness, those tears and meltings, which is requisite in those returners whom Christ will welcome.

*Ans.* 1. Observe, there is a threefold tenderness, a tenderness of heart and will, a passionate tenderness, and a tenderness in expressions.

Tenderness of *heart or will* is when the will is pliable, when it is facile and easy to yield to Christ. And so that is a hard heart which is stiff and untractable, which will not be persuaded, is not yielding and complying with the will of Christ. This the Scripture calls a hard heart; and it is so, whatever meltings or relentings there be in it upon occasion. There are some natural men who will find strange meltings and passionate motions within them at the hearing of some pathetical discourse on the sufferings of Christ, or the like affecting exercise, whose hearts are nevertheless as hard, in Scripture phrase, as the nether millstone; even as that wax, which you call hard, will melt if you apply it to a flame, but hard it is, and so we account it for all that. That is soft wax indeed which with a little warmth becomes ductile and pliable, so as you may mould it into any form, and is apt to receive any impression. And that is a soft heart which is pliable in the hand of Christ, which will be moulded as he would have it, which is not stiff against his word, but yields to any signification of his will.

The *passionate* tenderness consists in grief and sorrow, when these passions or affections are easily raised, excited, and drawn out by their proper objects and occasions, when the objects of them are sin, and the unkindness and dishonour to God that is in sin. The Scripture comprises this also under the notion of a soft and tender heart. The heart in Scripture is both will and affections.

The tenderness of *expressions* consists in tears and weeping, and this is properly a softness or tenderness of complexion.

Now, for the application of the several parts of this distinction to our purpose,

*Ans.* 2. This tenderness of expression in tears and weeping may be where there is no tenderness of heart in Scripture sense. This, as it is free, so it signifies rather a tender complexion of body than a tender constitution of the heart. This is not a property, but a common and separable accident of a soft heart. There may be tears, and that in abundance, and possibly in some consideration of sin too, where the heart is extremely hard. And, on the contrary, there may be a very tender heart, a heart of flesh, the blessing of the covenant, where there are no tears at all. It is in this case as it is with words in reference to prayer, there may be a prayer where there are no words, as in Hannah; and there may be words, yea, very high expressions, where there is no prayer; for the essence of a prayer consists in the desires and motions of the soul, the expressions are but the dress and outward garb of it. So here, there may be a soft heart where there are no tears, and there may be many tears where the heart is exceeding hard; for tenderness of heart consists principally in a pliability to the will of Christ, seconded with some motion of the affections.

And as words and expressions in prayer, so tears may proceed from some other cause than tenderness of heart. Indeed, they depend much upon age, natural temper of the mind, or complexion of the body.

So that from want of this tenderness of expression you cannot duly conclude a hardness of heart either in yourselves or others. Indeed, if crosses, disappointments, loss of friends, and other sorrowful accidents in the world, can draw tears from you, and the consideration of sin, its unkindness, dishonour, heinousness will draw none, this alters the case; this signifies the want of them is from the constitution of a hard heart rather than a less tender complexion of body.

Otherwise you cannot from hence conclude your heart is hard, and so have no ground from hence to discourage you from coming to Christ and resting on him. If there were a just ground to discourage from believing, it might as well hinder those who have true faith from being true believers; for many, who are truly and eminently so, while they can find a heart bleeding for sin, yet want an eye that can weep for it; the renewed constitution of their souls help them to that, but the temper of their bodies will not afford this.

*Ans.* 8. The way to have clear evidence of a soft and tender heart, is to believe. This is the direct way, both to get present hardness removed, and to get a sure evidence that former hardness is removed. This is clear from what I have premised. Tenderness of heart, that which the Lord in Scripture most commends to us, consists principally in a pliability with the will of Christ, an easiness to be persuaded by him, a facileness to yield to him, a softness that will be easily bended into a compliance with his good pleasure. Now this is the will of Christ, that thou wouldst come to him, believe in him, rest on him. This is his will, wilt thou comply? This he calls thee to, wilt thou answer his call? This he persuades thee to, art thou easy to be persuaded by him? This is thy present duty, that will afford thee the clearest evidences. We are apt to flatter ourselves with imaginary compliances in duties past or future. Oh, say the Jews, if the Messiah would come, how would we receive him! how would we rejoice in him! but when he has come indeed, and they were put upon trial by a present duty, the deceit appeared. Instead of receiving him, they rejected him; instead of welcoming him with joy, they pursue and persecute him with a strong hatred. So in another case, they flatter themselves with a compliance, upon an imaginary supposal. Oh, say they, if we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would never have treated the prophets as they did. And yet when Christ himself, the great prophet, was amongst them, and their present duty was to hear him, the deceit appeared, the hardness of their hearts was manifest. They treat him as unworthily as ever their forefathers did the former prophets. We have the same deceitful hearts, and are as ready to impose upon ourselves by the very like delusion. Oh, says one, if I should be assaulted with such a foul temptation, how far would I be from yielding to it! and yet the temptation that he is under at present, he yields to it. Oh, says another, if I were called to suffer, as martyrs formerly, I hope I should suffer cheerfully, and part with all; and yet his present duty he neglects; the sacrificing knife of a mortifying course must not touch his lust; he cannot suffer that, who fancies he would readily suffer all. Indeed, these imaginary compliances argue no tenderness of heart, but that which is merely imaginary; it is but a fancy, a delusion, there is no reality in it. But if thou wouldst not be deluded, here thou mayest have a just trial. How doest thou demean thy-

self towards thy present duty? If thy heart be tender indeed, it will not be stiff against it, it will yield to it.

Christ requires thee to abandon every sin, the lusts, carnal or worldly, which thou hast been so fast in league with; doest thou yield here? Does thy heart say, 'Lo, I come to do thy will, O God; thy law is in my heart; my soul has received the impressions of it, I desire nothing more in all the world than to be rid of sin.

Christ requires thee to receive him as thy Lord; does thy heart yield? Does thy soul answer, I'll have no Lord, no king but Jesus; his burden shall be light to me, his yoke shall be easy; Oh that he would bore mine ear, that I might be in his service for ever! Oh that he would free me from this slavery to sin and the world, which is so intolerable to me!

Christ requires thee to come and cast thyself on him; here is thy present duty. Wilt thou be persuaded to it? Yield now, and thou needest not doubt but thy heart is soft and tender. A persuadable heart is a soft heart; thou needest never any more make this a discouragement.

*Ans. 4.* As for that passionate tenderness, which consists in grief and sorrow for sin, never expect these to purpose, till thou believest. These ingenuous meltings, those passionate relentings, those streams of sorrow, which thou wantest and longest for, they are the fruits, not the fore-runners, of faith. If thou expect them full and ripe before thou believest, thou expectest fruits of a tree before it be planted. That which pierces the heart, that which makes it a spring of sorrow, that which sends forth the streams of it in abundance, is the sight of Christ pierced, the sight of him by faith; it is the eye of faith beholding Christ pierced, and pierced for thee, that will so affect the heart, as to dissolve it into sorrow, and spring in it a bitter mourning, Zech. xii. 10. When the eye of faith sees Christ pierced, when it sees him lifted up in that highest expression of his love, when the heat of that love reaches the heart, when the shines of Christ's countenance, the beams of the Sun of righteousness, penetrate into the soul, then will it melt, then will it dissolve indeed, then will it flow out in streams of sorrow. Those meltings that are most kindly, that sorrow which is most ingenuous, is the proper issue of faith, that which follows it, not that which goes before it. When thou hast experience of the loving-kindness of Christ; when thou feelest his tender compassions to thee; when thou findest him as it were falling upon thy neck, and kissing thee; what, such love, such compassions, such kindness for me! for me, who have been so unkind, so unworthy! for me, who have been such a rebel, such a prodigal! oh, a heart of flint will melt now, and the rock will be dissolved into waters! This is the effect of faith; it is unreasonable to expect the effect till the cause is in being. The want of this should not discourage from believing; it is not to be expected before. But if thy heart desires it, the want, the desires of it, should quicken thee to make haste to Christ, make haste to believe; because this is the only way to obtain what thou desirest, to be possessed of this melting temper.

*Obj.* Oh, but I have slept out the day of my gracious visitation; I fear the time of mercy is expired. I have often resisted the Spirit, long neglected, yea, rejected the offers of Christ and mercy; and now I am afraid the decree is gone forth against me. Alas! I fear it is too late.

*Ans.* This is a tender point, I must proceed warily in it. The resolution may be useful to all, and therefore I shall insist a little on it. For answer, 1, I premise some things by way of concession; 2, add some things for satisfaction.

1. By way of concession. (1.) It is granted, there is a time wherein the Lord offers mercy; which being determined and come to its period, the Lord withdraws, the sinner is left to himself in a forlorn condition, to reap the woeful fruits of his own obstinacy.

This time expires, when the Lord, provoked by obstinate resistance and wilful refusals, gives over the sinner as hopeless and incurable; will use no more importunity, will strive no longer; leaves him to those lusts, and in that state which he has chosen; seals him up under spiritual judgments; gives him up to blindness of mind, hardness of heart, a spirit of slumber, a reprobate sense. Nothing more evident in Scripture than that there is such a time of grace, and such a period of it, Ezek. xxiv. 18. The Lord would have purged them, while he afforded means for this purpose. They resisting those means, rendering them ineffectual, this time ended. And this was the end of it, Thou shalt not be purged; and the Lord seals it, ver. 14. Mat. xxiii. 37, Christ would have gathered them. While he endeavoured this, it was their time of mercy; but they would not be gathered; this puts a period to that time. He leaves them, that is the issue of it, and their house is left unto them desolate, Luke xix. 42. They had light to discover the things which concerned their peace. All the while that shined, it was their day; but they neglected, shut their eyes, employed about other objects; so these things are hid from their eyes. There is their night, the sad period of that gracious day, Isa. lv. 6. There is a time when the Lord may be found, while he is near. That is the time of mercy. But the expression implies there is a time when he will not be found, when he is gone far out of sight, out of call. That is the time succeeding the former, a time of rejection. As sinners have their time of rejecting God, so he has his time of rejecting them, Prov. i. When the Lord calls, stretches out his hand, that is the time of mercy; but their continued refusals and neglects puts a period to that time, it ends sadly.

When this woeful period comes, the gospel, in itself a message of peace and love, has then a new commission of a sad tenor, Isa. vi. 10. When this period comes, then comes forth that dreadful decree, 'He that is unrighteous, let him be unrighteous still,' &c., Rev. xxii. 11.

(2.) This time of visitation is sometimes longer, sometimes shorter; it is continued to some more, to some less. The period comes sometimes later, sometimes more suddenly. And no particular man knows but his own share therein may be the shortest.

This time is in some places measured by years. Three years is allotted them who are represented by the fig-tree, Mat. xiii. 6, 7. With much importunity, one year longer is obtained. And about so many years was Christ gathering Jerusalem: the time of that their visitation was of betwixt three and four years' continuance. This time is elsewhere expressed by a day, as if it were confined in such a narrow compass: Heb. iii., 'To-day, if ye will hear his voice.' This is the day of salvation; and this, as other days, is sometimes shorter, sometimes longer. To some it is a longer day, like the days of summer; to others it proves a winter day, a day of short continuance.

To determine precisely of the continuance of this time, to say thus long it shall be, and no shorter, to fix its period, is a presumption for any son of man to undertake. The length and period of these times and seasons of grace, the Lord has reserved in his own power, they are amongst his secrets. He has cut off all occasions of presuming on his patience, leaving us at uncertainties. No man can make account of another hour, he is not sure of any further moment.

Only this seems clear in the negative : the time of grace to a particular man is not always as long as his life, how short soever his life be. The longest time of patience we find allotted to any, is that determined for the old world, Gen. vi. 3. These are those days of which the apostle Peter says, that the long-suffering of God waited on them, and that Christ, by his Spirit in his servant Noah, preached to them, 1 Pet. iii. 19, 20, which Spirit, in his ministry, did strive with them ; so that this was the time of their visitation, and the continuance of it is an hundred and twenty years. Yet this was not the seventh part of the time to which their lives were ordinarily prolonged before the flood. An hundred and twenty years, compared with their lifetime, is not so long for them as ten years are now for us. I think we may conclude, though the time of grace be sometimes shorter, sometimes longer, yet it is seldom drawn out to the length of lifetime. Sin often puts a shorter period to it. Many men who live under the gospel, outlive their time of grace.

(8.) It were just with the Lord to put a period to the time of grace, upon the first refusal of any offer of grace. A wonderful thing if Christ and mercy be ever again offered, after it has been once refused ; for as the apostle argues, 2 Pet. ii. 4, ' If God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell,' why should man expect any favour or forbearance ? The angels were glorious and powerful creatures ; man is an impotent and contemptible worm in comparison. Those angels, for one sin, were destroyed ; men laden with multitudes of sins are spared. Those angels perished, for anything appears to us, without any mercy so much as once offered them ; sinful men have Christ and mercy tendered, before justice seize on them. Now, if it were just with the Lord to destroy the angels, without any offer of grace made to them, may he not justly proceed against sinful men, after grace offered and rejected by them ? Might he not justly proceed upon the first rejecting of it ?

(4.) It must be granted that any refusal of Christ and mercy is exceedingly dangerous. If we consider who Christ is, what pardon cost him, who the sinner is to whom these are offered, we may easily see that any slighting or refusal of these offers does highly provoke the Lord to take you at the first word. You make excuses. You cannot yet close with the terms of the gospel : you are too busy, you have no leisure. Well may the Lord say, Be it so ; yet you shall have leisure enough to see your madness in eternal torments ; you shall have leisure enough in that endless eternity. You use delays. You cannot yet enter into the strict and holy ways of Christ ; you will have a little more ease, a little more pleasure, a little more gain by sin. Well may he say, Ye will not when ye may, ye shall not when ye would ; ye shall never taste of the sweetness and happiness of my holy ways. Ye will not take Christ, and submit to him, on the terms he is offered. Well, it shall be so ; ye shall never have Christ ; ' ye shall die in your sins.' Ye will not come when I invite you. Well, ' not one of you shall taste of my supper.' It is Christ's threatening in so many words, Mat. xiv. 24. The apostle insinuates the danger in the form of that expression, Heb. ii. 3. Here is very great danger ; here is occasion enough of fear, lest the Lord, being thus provoked, should ' swear in his wrath, Ye shall never enter into his rest.'

(5.) Some, in special manner, have great cause to fear that their day is past. I say not they have ground certainly to conclude it, but cause to fear it. Some signs of an expired day of grace are visible upon them, such as are probable signs, though not infallible. Such as these, to give you briefly some instances :

[1.] A long, wilful continuance in known sins, under a searching, convincing, and lively ministry. Take it as I deliver it, lest it be mistaken. When a man continues in sins, in known sins, continues long in them, continues in them wilfully and obstinately, and that is resolved to do it, under a ministry that shews him it, convinces him of it, threatens it, declares the danger and sinfulness, and brings this home to his heart and conscience, I say not this is a certain sign, but I say it is a dangerous sign, that the day of his visitation is expired. I say not this case is utterly desperate ; but were I without assurance of heaven, and under doubts and fears of my eternal state, yet would I not be in that sinner's condition for ten thousand worlds, for such are scarce ever recovered.

[2.] When the means of grace are withdrawn upon contempt and refusals, when the candlestick is removed, the glory departed, the light of the gospel gone, then it is too plain the day is at an end. When you see the sun set and the light gone, you doubt not but the day is expired. When no gospel light is left, the things that concern a sinner's peace must needs be hid from his eyes. And this is it wherewith Christ shuts up Jerusalem's day.

[3.] When men withdraw from the means of grace, though the means be not withdrawn from them. A man may make it night in his chamber when it is day abroad, by shutting out that light which makes the day. Thus may a man bring a night upon himself in particular, though those in the same place enjoy a day of visitation, when, after other disobediences to the word, he adds this contempt, he will not so much as hear it ; when he puts away the word from him, or puts himself from it. Thus the Jews' day ended. Though they might have had the word, they would not, Acts xiii. 46. That which was hereby brought to the Gentiles, departed from the Jews ; that was light and salvation, ver. 47. Those that put themselves from the word, or put the word from them, put light and likewise salvation from them ; and when they are gone, sure the day of grace is expired.

[4.] When the Spirit will strive no more with a sinner, then he is cast off. The means of grace are continued, and he attends on them ; and has formerly, in the ministry of the word, found some motions of heart, some stirrings of affection, some strugglings of conscience ; but now all is hushed and gone, the sense of his soul is locked up, as it were, in a deep slumber ; a stupefying humour is seized upon every faculty, and the promises, the threatenings, the terror of the law, the sweetness of the gospel, fall on his heart with no more effect than if it were a senseless thing. This is a dangerous sign his time is past. When the Spirit will strive no more with a sinner, his day is at an end. The end of the old world's day is thus described, Gen. vi. 3.

2. Though all this must be granted, yet there remains enough to satisfy this scruple. We shall comprise it in these heads.

(1.) It is not usual with Christ to put an end to the time of grace when his gracious offers are first refused. Though he might justly do it upon the first provocation, yet such is his mercy, his patience, he will not be so provoked. He breaks not off the treaty with sinners when his terms are first rejected, but sends his ambassadors again and again to beseech, to importune, to persuade sinners to be reconciled, and to be at peace with him. The treaty, when sinners would break it off, is often resumed, and those gracious proposals renewed and also reinforced, 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15, on which you have a comment, Jer. xxv. 8, 4. The Lord from time to

time diligently addressed himself to them by the prophets. No time was slipped; they rise early day by day, and that for divers years.

He uses not to depart, though he might justly, when the heart opens not to him at the first knock, but he stands knocking, Rev. iii. 20. He stands long, all the day long, Cant. v. 2. Though there is more provocation in the unkindness of his spouse than of strangers, yet this occasions not a sudden departure. He stays till his head be wet with the drops of the night. When they will not be gathered at first, he tries again, he tries often: Mat. xxiii., 'How often would I have gathered you?' &c. He withdraws not the golden sceptre, if sinners come not in, when it is first holden forth. He stretches it out all the day long, even to the stiff-necked, those that will not stoop to it, those that rebel and rise up against the sceptre of his Son. If the day should end at the first provocation, if this day should be thus shortened, no flesh would be saved. There are divers hours in this day; if they come not in at one, he tries another. He goes out at the third, the sixth, the ninth, the eleventh, all the hours into which their day was divided, Mat. xx. 3. He that, when he was first called, said he would not go, was not shut out because he went not at the first call, Mat. xxi. 28, 30. The Lord waits to be gracious; that imports a continued patience and expectance, 1 Pet. iii. 20. He strives, he gives not over at the first impulse. He comes seeking fruit for some years together, one year after another, Luke xiii. 6, 7. That seems great severity, Mark xi. 13. It was not a good, a seasonable year for figs; it afforded not many. This seems extraordinary rigid and severe, that he should be so quick with it as to curse and blast it at the first disappointment. But it appears so only as to the emblem, the fig-tree. As to Jerusalem, which it signifies, this was not the first disappointment. He had been with her again and again, and a third time, before he blasts her. He both comes and sends; and contents not himself to send once, how ill soever his messengers be treated, but sends a second, a third, a fourth time, as Mark xii. 1, 2, 4, 5, &c. He is not wont to take sinners at the first word; to offer no more, when they once refuse; to try no more, when they once resist. Alas! even the best, those that yield at length, yield not at first; they resist too long, too much. When Christ would lay his yoke on them, how easy soever it is, he finds them like an untamed heifer, a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. So they demean themselves. So it was with Ephraim, when returning, Jer. xxxi. 18. His demeanour was no better than that of an untamed and unruly beast. So Ephraim complains, and so all the people of God, who observe the carriage of their heart towards God while he is reducing them. Before you make your resisting and refusals a discouragement, first see if you can meet with any who can truly say they never resisted or refused.

(2.) No man can certainly determine concerning himself or another that the time of grace is past, especially where the means of grace are continued and made use of. Some probabilities there may be, which I gave an account of in the premised concessions; but no peremptory certainty. Some cause there may be to fear it, but no ground absolutely to conclude it. Indeed, one exception there lies against this rule. When it is known that a person hath committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, it may be known that there is no mercy, no more time of mercy for him. If that be certain, it will be an infallible sign his day of grace is ended. And it may be sometimes known that this unpardonable sin is committed; for the apostle makes it a rule that we should not pray for him that has sinned



unto death. Now if it could never be known when a man is guilty of this sin unto death, his rule would be utterly useless and unpracticable; he should lay down such a rule as none could ever practise or walk by. But to leave further inquiries into that, this may be sufficient for our present purpose, that the ground of the objection now before us, cannot be a ground to any one to conclude that he has committed the unpardonable sin. The ground of the scruple is refusing offers of mercy, resisting the Spirit. Now every one that resists the Holy Ghost, though he do it long and often, does not sin that sin against the Holy Ghost which shall not be pardoned. This is clear from Acts vii. 51. He tells the Jews they 'always resisted the Holy Ghost;' they had resisted, and resisted the Holy Ghost, and that striving with them in the most powerful ministry that ever the world enjoyed. Not only their fathers, in the ministry of the prophets, but in the ministry of Christ himself and of the apostles, wherein the Holy Ghost appeared in the clearest light and greatest power, in the glory, power, and convincing evidence of miracles. Here they had resisted the Holy Ghost; and that not once only, or seldom, or for a short time, but always. And yet these had not sinned against the Holy Ghost unpardonably; for Stephen, full of the Holy Ghost, prays for their pardon, ver. 60. Now if their sin had been that against the Holy Ghost, he would not have prayed for them, there is a rule which prohibits that, 1 John v. 16. Further, Saul was one of the resisters of the Holy Ghost, being one of his persecutors, ver. 58, and so one that he prayed for. And his prayer was heard for Saul; his conversion, of which you have an account presently after, is accounted a return of Stephen's prayer. So that though he did resist the Holy Ghost, yet sinned not unpardonably; otherwise Stephen would not have prayed for him, he could not have been pardoned, he would not have been converted. From hence also it appears that a man may resist the Holy Ghost much, long, often, so as to amount to an *always*, and yet his day of mercy may [not] be expired. And so it was with Saul, whom grace at last conquered, after such resistance. Though you have resisted the Holy Ghost, you cannot from hence be certain that you have sinned the unpardonable sin, you cannot hence be certain that the time of mercy is at an end. There is no certainty of it for all this.

(3.) There are strong probabilities, such as are next to certainties, for the sensible or gospel-sinner, that this day is not past. I shall give you some signs of it; some that will be probable grounds, some that may be certain grounds, that his time of mercy is not expired.

[1.] Fear that it is past is a probable sign it is not past; for Satan usually troubles those most with fears of this who have least cause to fear it, and leaves them most secure and fearless who have most cause to be fearful. This is the way whereby he promotes his great design upon sinners. His great interest is to make them sure to himself; to effect this, he strives to cut off all endeavours by representing them hopeless, so he tells them their day is past, it is to no purpose.

He would take off insensible sinners from endeavours by representing them needless; their state is safe, or else they have time enough, they need not fear, he will not have them disturbed with any such fears while they are in his custody, that being quiet, they may not so much as think of an escape. 'The strong man armed keeps the house,' &c., Luke xi. 21. They are asleep in sin, and while they are so, he is sure of them, so he is concerned to keep them from being awakened with any such fears. While they are thus lulled asleep, they dream that mercy, grace, heaven, and all

is sure ; they put away the evil day far from them when it is just upon them ; ' They cry peace, peace, when sudden destruction is coming upon them ; ' they will not so much as apprehend, conceive of it, till they be in travail ; they go on, bless themselves, say they shall have peace, Deut. xxix. 19. Such a security had seized on the old world when their day was expired, Luke xvii. 27. When the Lord had rejected the Jews, and so their day was gone, the effects hereof was a spirit of slumber, Rom. xi. 8. The word in the prophet, נֹד, signifies to nod, Isa. xxix. 10, which is the consequent of a sleepy or lethargic humour, which leaves them senseless : ' Eyes they have, but see not ; ears, but hear not.' They see no cause of fear, nor will they hear of any ; without sense of danger, and so without fear. Such a spirit of slumber is a sign of an expired day. But when the soul is fearful it is wakeful, the spirit of slumber has not seized on it ; that is a probable sign the time of mercy is not past. Your fears may give you hope in this case.

[2.] When there is a diligent attending upon the means of grace, it is a sign the day of grace is still continued. When the Lord gives the heart to be diligent in the use of his appointments, to be diligent in hearing him in the word, seeking him by prayer, and giving encouragements to his messengers, it is a sign the Lord is not yet gone, he has something further to do before he depart. We find not that the Lord utterly rejects a people till they some way or other reject him in his messengers, or in those means of grace wherein he offers himself. The Lord gives encouragement to those that diligently seek him ; those that hear him, watching at his gates, and waiting at the posts of his doors ; and so long as here is encouragement, the time of mercy is not past ; when that is gone, all hopes are gone.

When the Lord sends forth his disciples, he orders, that when any received them, there they should stay, and their staying was a continuing, a prolonging of the day of grace and visitation ; but if any would not receive them, *i. e.*, hearken to them, entertain them, encourage them, they were to shake off the dust of their feet, as a token that such were cast off by the Lord, Mat. x. 14. And we find Paul and Barnabas proceeding according to this rule, Acts xiii. 46, 51. When the Jews put away the word from them, they shook off the dust, to signify that the Lord had so shaken off that people, he had quite left them off, their time was past.

When the Lord is gone, a spirit of sloth and torpor seizes on the soul ; he will not stir up himself to follow after God or wait on him, a spirit of contempt possesses him, he cares not for the means of grace. He hears now and then out of custom, but if some by-respects did not move him, he cares not much if he never heard at all. As this temper provokes God to put a period to the day of grace, so, when it is ended, this sloth and contempt increases. As it was before, in its beginnings and progress, a cause, and so it is now, in its height, a sign that the Lord has cast him off, his time is past and gone.

But when there is a heart to prize the means of grace, and to attend on them accordingly, it is a probable sign not only that the day of grace is continued, but that the Lord will continue it yet longer, if this be thy case.

[3.] When there are desires after the breathings and workings of the Spirit in the ordinances, this is a sign of more evidence and probability than the former. When the soul cannot be contented with this, that he enjoys the means of grace, and that he waits on them, unless he find himself wrought upon by them, unless he find some enlightenings, some motions of the heart, some stirrings of affection ; cannot rest in the bare

performance of holy duties unless he find some light and heat of the Spirit in them ; is not satisfied that he prays unless he find that his heart moves therein more than his lips, nor that he hears the word unless his soul be affected with what he hears. If this be thy case, thou countest it a sad day, a sad duty (whatever other respect may commend it to thee), when no other impression is made on thy soul, thou hast no cause to fear thy day is past. The Lord never withdraws while his presence is desired. The Spirit never leaves that soul which is ready to make him welcome, while his workings and breathing are acceptable and desired. These desires argue he might be welcome if he would come in ; his workings would be acceptable if he would vouchsafe it. The Lord is with you while you are with him ; and so far as you truly desire his effectual presence, so far he counts you with him. The Lord does not judge of us by what we are, but what we would be.

[4.] When the Spirit is striving with the soul. When he not only desires the strivings of the Spirit, but feels them, this is not only a strong probability, but an evident certainty that his time is not past. When the Spirit looks into the mind, and lets in some light to discover the things that concern a sinner's peace ; when Christ is knocking at the heart, and using importunity to get in ; when he is awakening the conscience to a sense of sin and misery ; when the Spirit is thus enlightening, convincing, persuading, humbling ; when the word is brought home to the mind, heart, and conscience with these effects, it is evident the Spirit is not gone, for he is now at work. If this be thy case, thy day is so far from being ended, that it is now at the height. This is the accepted time, this is thy hour, take heed thou do not slip it. Satan makes the hour of thy visitation an hour of temptation ; he would make thee let it slip by persuading thee it is past already ; but as sure as he is a liar this is truth, it is now thy day ; this is the accepted time, and will be a day of salvation if thou improve it, if thou yield to the Spirit's strivings, and resist no longer : ' My Spirit shall not always strive,' Gen. vi. 8, and then sets down how long the Spirit should strive. The length of our days is measured by the continuance of the Spirit's striving. Every hour that he strives is an hour of that day. It is not night till the Spirit will strive no longer. And therefore your day is not yet ended who feel the Spirit still striving.

[5.] When the soul is grieved for former refusal ; when the heart bleeds to think of former resistance. This clearly signifies the day is not past. You may see this in Ephraim, Jer. xxxi. 18. Here is first observable his resistance : when the Lord took him in hand, would have laid his yoke upon him, brought him under his government, he demeaned himself as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke ; he was wanton, unruly, slung off and refused, withdrew his shoulder and resisted. Turn thou, else no turning. Then take notice how he resents this. When he came to himself he bewails it. This was it for which he bemoaned himself ; of this he was ashamed, confounded ; for this he smote upon his thigh, used all the actions of one moaning himself under pain and grief ; such grief, shame, sorrow did the thoughts of his former resistings and refusals smite his heart with. If this be thy case, why then surely it is the time of mercy ; for so Ephraim in this condition found it, ver. 20. Though he spake against him for his former froward refusals, and perverse resistings, yet when he saw Ephraim remember this, so as his soul was troubled for it, why the Lord does earnestly remember him, and his bowels are troubled for relenting Ephraim. I will surely see here. If Ephraim's case be thine, though thou have

resisted as he did, yet if thou art troubled for it, as he was, the Lord assures thee of mercy; it is not only a time wherein he offers, but a time wherein he will vouchsafe it; he assures thee of it. It is so far from being past already, as it shall never be past; thou mayest be sure of it, if the Lord's word can make it sure.

[6.] When the Spirit has prevailed with the soul to refuse and resist no longer. When it does not only strive, but prevail with a sinner, so far as to be heartily willing to yield to Christ on his own terms. This is an undoubted sign that the time is not past, when the soul strives and wrestles with that principle of opposition and resistance that is in itself, &c. If this be thy case, thy day is so far from being ended, as it shall never end.

(4.) The readiest way to put this out of question is to believe, to cast thy soul on Christ. There is no danger for a sensible sinner to venture on this; there is all encouragement. Thy day is not so past, but if thou come in there is mercy for thee; if thou lay down thy weapons and submit, Christ will receive thee. He does not say, I have mercy, but it is only for those who have [not] refused and resented. This is contrary to the tenor of the gospel. The promises are not in any such strain. That whosoever believes, not that those only who have not resisted so long or so much, but that 'whosoever believes shall be saved;' 'He that comes, I will in no wise cast out,' upon no consideration, however he have resisted and refused. The apostle Paul is an encouraging instance. Who had more resisted and refused than he? Consider what resistance he made. It was a scornful resistance, Acts ix. 5. He kicked against Christ, he rejected his offers with scorn. It was a violent and bloody resistance; he resisted Christ unto blood and slaughter of his messengers; he embued himself in the blood of Christ's members, Acts viii. 1, 3, ix. 1, 2. It was a continued resistance; he was one of those of whom Stephen complains, Acts vii. 51. Now, was his time of mercy expired for all this? No; he believed and found mercy, and he found mercy for this very purpose, that he might encourage thee, that he might be a pattern, an encouraging instance to all humbled and returning sinners, whatever their refusals or resistance have been. He tells you so expressly: 1 Tim. i. 16, 'For this cause,' &c. Christ holds him out as a standing instance of his great long-suffering, that every humbled and returning sinner, apt to be discouraged from believing by the sad consideration of his former rebellious and obstinate resistance, might in him clearly see that he is not so short and quick with sinners as to cut them off from mercy for some resistings, no, not for such resistings as Saul's were. They put not a period to his time of mercy, but upon believing he found mercy. If thou hadst resisted as he did, yet believe as he did, and thou shalt find like mercy. The Holy Ghost has recorded this example on purpose to encourage those that should believe hereafter.

*Obj.* 6. Another discouragement which keeps sensible sinners from believing, is a fear that they have sinned the unpardonable sin. There are two extremes of faith (as every grace and virtue has its extremes), presumption and despair. If Satan can drive the sinner into either, both being at the greatest distance from the middle, he keeps them far enough from faith. Now that his malicious attempts may be successful, he suits them to the condition of the sinner. Those that are secure he draws them to presumption, of which before. Those that are sensible and awakened, he would drive them to despair, and the most effectual engine to this purpose is that which is now before us, a suggestion that they have sinned

against the Holy Ghost, and so there remains no more sacrifice for sin, Christ can profit them nothing, it is impossible they should be renewed either by repentance or faith.

This is a temptation whereby he too often perplexes awakened sinners ; nay, this fiery dart he sometimes sticks in the consciences of believers too. Those that are not assaulted have no security but they may be. Therefore it will not be amiss to give some satisfaction to this scruple, such as may serve either for cure or prevention.

That which will be most satisfactory is a right understanding of the nature of this sin. The great advantage of that prince of darkness is, that he assaults the soul in the dark, and when he wants light to judge, puts that upon him for this sin, which indeed is no such thing. The texts wherein this sin is described will scatter this darkness. I shall not engage in a full discourse on this subject, but only open this sin by opening those texts, so far as may be sufficient for my present purpose, as briefly as may be consistent with perspicuity. There are many scriptures where this sin is mentioned, but I find but three where it is described : Mat. xii., Heb. vi. and x., with the other evangelists concurring. And from these scriptures we may collect this description of this sin. It is a blasphemous renouncing of Christ and his doctrine out of hatred, and against conviction by the Holy Ghost's light and testimony. We shall take it into parcels, that you may see distinctly how every part is contained in all and every of those alleged texts. (1.) It is a renouncing or denying of Christ. (2.) With blasphemy and reproaches. (3.) Out of hatred and malice. (4.) Against light and conviction. The two former are as the matter of it ; the two latter the form which constitutes this sin in its peculiar being, and distinguisheth it from all other sins.

(1.) A renouncing or denying of Christ and his doctrine. You may see this in the scribes and Pharisees, Mat. xii. When Christ by a miracle had drawn the people to acknowledge that he was the Messiah, ver. 28, nay, say the Pharisees, he is not the Messiah for all this, this he does by the power of Satan ; he is not the king of Israel, the king of the church, but he tampers with the prince of devils. He is not the prophet, but a conjuror, a deluder, and consequently he is not the great high priest that must be a sacrifice for sinners ; for a sinner cannot be a sacrifice for sin. This more expressly elsewhere : ' We will not have this man to reign,' Luke xix., and so rejected him as king. No : ' but he deceives the people,' John vii. 12. So rejected him as prophet. And after crucifying him as a malefactor, shed his blood as the blood of a notorious sinner, and so utterly denied him to be the priest, even when they made him a sacrifice.

So answerably in Heb. vi. It is a falling away, a falling off from Christ, his ways and truths, a putting him to open shame ; not only a putting Christ away, but a putting him away with shame and reproach ; a crucifying him again, that is a renouncing of him with a witness.

So Heb. x. 29. A treading the Son of God under foot, a casting him down from being king, so as to trample on him ; accounting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, no better than common blood, the blood of a malefactor. So his priesthood is renounced ; for it was that blood by which he was sanctified or consecrated to be a sacrifice, John xvii. 19.

Doing despite to the Spirit. So the prophetic office of Christ and the doctrine which he teaches is rejected ; for it is the Spirit of grace and truth by which Christ executes his prophetic office.

Christ is renounced, both when there is a falling off from him, after he has been professed and acknowledged, so it is described in that Epistle, or when there is an opposing of him, when clearly and convincingly propounded, though he have not been openly professed. So it is described in the Gospel as the sin of the Pharisees. Here is some difference in the subjects, but the act is the same, a renouncing of Christ in both.

(2.) With blasphemies and reproaches. This sin is expressly called blasphemy, Mat. xii. 31 and 32, speaking a word, that is, a blasphemous word, such as is shameful and reproachful to him. The blaspheming of the Son is called blaspheming of the Holy Ghost, because it is against the Son as discovered and borne witness to by the Holy Ghost; against the person, offices, and doctrine of the Son, but against the light and testimony of the Holy Ghost. Their particular blasphemy is set down, ver. 24, where they do as bad as call Christ a conjuror, and the Holy Ghost, whereby he acted, an evil spirit, the prince of devils. Expressly, Mark iii. 22, 30. And this was their blasphemy, ver. 29; this sin is blaspheming too, as described Heb. vi. 6, a putting Christ to open shame, ascribing that openly to him which is shameful and reproachful. It is the same word which is used Mat. i. 19, *παρεστημι*, to make a shameful example of her. He was willing to put her away, but not so as to make her a public shame and reproach. But this sin is a putting Christ away, a rejecting him in a shameful and reproachful way, with blasphemies and opprobrious reflections and aspersions. So Heb. x. 29, *εὐσεβείας*; to use one injuriously and contumeliously, rendered *contumeliâ afficere*. When Christ, as held out by the light and testimony of the Spirit of grace, is shamefully abused, either in words or deeds, he and the Spirit are blasphemed; really blasphemed, by injurious affronts; verbally, by opprobrious and reproachful speeches. The word will bear either, so that in all the descriptions it is blasphemy.

(3.) Out of hatred and malice. This is the rise, the principle, from whence this sin proceeds; it is from hatred of Christ and his truth. It is not for want of care and watchfulness, as in sins of surprisal; nor from want of knowledge, as in sins of ignorance; nor from passion and fear, as in sins of infirmity; nor from boldness merely, as in some sins of presumption; but from hatred and malice. This was the rise of it in the Pharisees, this was at the bottom. That which appeared was horrible, they broke out into blasphemies; but Christ minds not that only, but what was within, Mat. xii. 24, 25. He takes an estimate of their sin, not by their words only, but by their thoughts, which were boiled up and set a-working by hatred and malice. And this he charges them with expressly elsewhere, John xv. 25; cited from Ps. xxxv. 19, where the word is *οἶκτος*, used 1 Sam. xix. 5, hated him as Saul did David. This put them upon rejecting his government, Luke xix. 14, upon rejecting his doctrine, John iii. 19, John vii. 7. This put them upon seeking his life, and murdering him when they had found opportunity. It was not anger, for that acts rashly; but they consulted how they might do it, John xi. 53, acted deliberately, and so were wilful and malicious murderers.

Aristotle puts this difference betwixt anger and hatred, *ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἀπὸ παθὸν βούλεται ὡς ἐργίζεσθαι, ὁ δὲ μὴ εἶναι*. Anger would make him suffer who has occasioned it, but hatred would deprive him of his being. Nothing less would satisfy the hatred wherewith they were acted but a shameful and cruel death. And this hatred is expressed by the like acts, Heb. vi. 6; they crucify him again; not as to the physical action; that cannot be repeated,

Christ is now above their malice ; but as to judicial interpretation. They disprove\* not what the Jews did, they have the same malicious mind, they use him as far as may be like the Jews ; if the same could be done, they would do it again. Their actings against him, his truth, his members, are equivalent, they will bear such an interpretation. What clearer expressions of hatred, than Heb. x. 29, to trample on him, to vilify his blood as the blood of a malefactor. If their tongues do not speak it, their actions do. All is of malice, they do despite to the Spirit of grace. Their actings are from spite and malice. It is clear, in all the descriptions, that there is in this sin a hatred against Christ.

But observe, that it is not necessary to this sin, that this hatred should be of truth as truth, or of Christ as Christ, *i. e.*, as a Redeemer, as a Saviour, as the Son of God, or the Messiah ; for so he cannot be the object of hatred ; but it is a hatred of the truth and of Christ, and of the Spirit witnessing of him, as these are contrary to their desires and expectations, to their lusts and interests, John iii. 19, vii. 7 ; Mat. xxi. 8 ; they feared Christ would deprive them of that power, honour, good opinion, which they then inherited amongst the people, &c.

(4.) All this must be against light and conviction. This is express, Heb. vi. 4-6 ; it is the falling away from Christ of those that have been enlightened ; so Heb. x. 26, a sinning after the receipt of knowledge, a sinning wilfully, which cannot be but against knowledge.

There is some question of this concerning the Pharisees, started by some who would otherwise state this sin ; but I see no reason for it, I see much in Scripture against it.

They knew that Christ wrought miracles, they acknowledge it, John xi. 47. It is strange if they were not convinced that these miracles were acts of a divine power, the finger of God. Can we think them more stupid than the Egyptian magicians ? They saw and acknowledged the finger of God in Moses's miracles, Exod. viii. 19. Were they blinder than those instruments of Satan in the midst of Egyptian darkness ? There was a convincing light went along with the miracles of Christ, which shewed their original, and convinced all the people who was the author of them : John xi. 47, 48, ' All will believe on him,' Mat. xii. 22, 28 ; John vii. 81 ; iii. 2. ' We,' *i. e.*, he, and those of his sect, the Pharisees, they knew it, were convinced of it ; and when they spake otherwise, said they were of the devil, they had something within them that gainsaid them ; they said it with some reluctance of conscience.

They were convinced that Christ was the Messiah ; the light of the Holy Ghost, shining in his doctrine and miracles, discovered this unto them ; though they were loath to see it, unwilling to believe it. Their rebellious will rising up against their judgment, did check and oppose this light, but it could not be avoided, nor quite suppressed. Christ tells them they knew him, John vii. 28. They knew he was the heir : Mat. xxi. 37, 38, ' This is the heir.' They knew who he was, and they perceived that Christ intended them in that parable, ver. 45, 46. All the three evangelists agree in it. This was that which completed this sin, so as it became unpardonable, Luke xxiii. 34. There were some of those actors against Christ that could not be forgiven, Luke xii. 10 ; for those Christ prays not ; he would not pray for that which he knew could not be granted.

But there were some who might be forgiven, for such he prays ; and who were those ? Why, those who knew not what they did, acted not against

\* Qu. ' disapprove' ?—Ed.

knowledge and conviction. So then, those who knew what they did, are they who could not be forgiven. Their sin, acted against knowledge and conscience, was the unpardonable sin. So Peter encouraging the Jews to repent, by proposing hopes of pardon, lays down this as the ground of the encouragement, Acts iii. 17-19, as your rulers, Herod and Pilate did, implying that if they acted against knowledge, if they had known him to be the Lord of life whom they crucified, there had been no hopes or encouragement for them.

Answerably, the apostle Paul shews how it came to pass that he found mercy, after he had so blasphemously and maliciously opposed Christ: 'I did it ignorantly,' 1 Tim. i. 13. There were all other ingredients of that unpardonable sin in Paul's sin, but this only, he acted not against knowledge and conscience; if he had not done it ignorantly, he had found no mercy, as the expression seems to insinuate.

This seems to be the reason why this sin directed against Christ is yet called the sin against the Holy Ghost. Light and conviction is the work of the Holy Ghost; his office and operation is to convey light, and thereby effect conviction. When Christ discovered convincingly by the light and testimony of the Holy Ghost is thus renounced, the Holy Ghost is blasphemed, which discovers and bears witness of him; his light and testimony is rejected and renounced. The Holy Ghost gave the Pharisees a double testimony of Christ. One,

[1.] Outward. Those miracles which he wrought were the work of the Spirit, ver. 28 (and elsewhere the receiving of miraculous gifts is called the receiving of the Holy Ghost), and they were wrought by the Spirit of God to testify of Christ, John v. 36; Mat. xii. 28.

[2.] Inward. And that is, when the Holy Ghost brings the light, which shines in the doctrine and miracles, home to the mind and conscience, with convincing evidence. When Christ appearing with this evidence is renounced, the Holy Ghost, whose evidence and testimony this is, is therein renounced, and so blasphemed.

And by this we may be led to conceive aright of that distinction, Luke xii. 10. Christ may be considered two ways, either as appearing in the weakness of human state, as merely the Son of man; or else as appearing in the light of the Holy Ghost, viz., in the light and evidence of his doctrine and miracles, whereby he is declared to be the Son of God with power. Blasphemy against the Son of God, in the former appearance, may be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Son, in the latter appearance, shall not be forgiven; because then it is the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, which, attended with the fore-mentioned ingredients, is declared to be unpardonable.

Thus you see what this sin is. Not every blasphemy, nor every blasphemous renouncing of Christ; no, nor every blasphemous opposition of Christ out of hatred; but withal this is done against knowledge and conscience. It is not every sin against knowledge and conscience; nor every blasphemy against knowledge and conscience; nor every blasphemous renouncing of Christ against these; but when there is all this out of hatred and malice. You must not judge yourselves or others guilty of it, because of one or more ingredients; there must be a concurrence of all, both matter and form, the form especially, else there cannot be this sin.

And this being positively cleared, will afford some negatives which may be most satisfactory in this case. I shall instance in such as are most apt to be mistaken; such sins, which humbled souls or others may take to be



the sin against the Holy Ghost, when indeed they are no such thing, fall short of it in something or other which is essential thereto.

1. It is not every forsaking of Christ. Then not only Judas, but the rest of the disciples had been guilty of this sin; for they forsook him, and that in his greatest extremity, when their love should most have shewed itself in cleaving to him, Mat. xxvi. 56, Mark xiv. 50. They all fled, and left him, to secure themselves. Only John must be excepted; we find him after in the high priest's hall. Hence is drawn an instance of Christ's faithfulness in making good his word, Mat. x., Luke ix. 28. John, who fled not from Christ to save his life, he saved it; he survived them all, lived to a great age, and died in his bed. All the rest, who fled to save their lives, lost them, and were plucked out of the world by violent death. But though they lost their lives, they did not lose their souls; they found pardon and favour, both to be saved themselves, and to be instruments for the saving of others. They were far from this sin, though one might think, by flying from Christ, they came near it.

2. It is not every resisting of the enlightening Spirit. A man may be guilty of sinning against the Holy Ghost, in such a high way as that of resistance, and yet not be guilty of *that* sin against the Holy Ghost. Many of those who did resist the Holy Ghost in the ministry of Christ, did yield afterwards to it in the ministry of the apostles, and so were converted and pardoned. I shewed you this before, from Acts vii. 51. Indeed, if all should sin unpardonably who resist the Spirit, who is there that would be pardoned? for who is there that has not resisted? Upon what account should the grace of the Spirit be called victorious, but that it meets with resistance? It is conquering grace, not because it is not resisted (that is no great conquest where there is no opposition), but because it prevails against resistance; not because it meets with no opposition, but because it masters all opposition.

3. It is not every persecuting of Christ, his truth, and members; no, not that which is out of spite and hatred. Such a persecutor was Paul, an eager persecutor, Philip. iii. 6, which zeal made it a piece of his religion. His zeal was as a burning flame, as wild-fire in the church; he wasted it, made havoc of it. His violence transported him beyond all bounds, Gal. i. 19. He did it out of hatred and malice, nothing would satisfy him but the blood and slaughter of Christ's saints, Acts xxii. 4, Acts ix. 1. An outrageous persecutor, pursued them with exceeding rage and fury, Acts xxvi. 11, his cruelty reached not only their bodies, but their souls. He 'compelled them to blaspheme,' and that was the high-way to destroy their souls. Now all this Christ takes as done against himself, Acts ix. 4, 5. All this fury and bloody rage is resented by Christ as let out upon himself, and yet he finds mercy.

4. It is not every blasphemy.

(1.) Not every blasphemy injected. There may be blasphemous suggestions cast into the mind, without any guilt of blasphemy, where they are not entertained and consented to, but rejected and cast out with indignation. In this case the soul is as it were ravished, and may be nothing the less chaste and pure, when it is a mere patient as to this force, and no consent yielded. Christ himself was assaulted by Satan with such suggestions. In the history of his temptation, you may observe Satan's drift is to fasten on him this doubt, that he was not the Son of God.

(2.) Not every blasphemy admitted. Blasphemous suggestions may be admitted so far by the saints of God, as to occasion some doubtings of a

blasphemous tendency, *e.g.*, concerning the providence of God, the natures and offices of Christ, the truth and divinity of Scripture. What unworthy thoughts had the psalmist of the providence of God, Ps. lxxiii. for which he censures himself severely as a fool and a beast.

Some of the disciples, after his death, seem to question whether he was the Messiah, the Redeemer of Israel, Luke xxiv. 21. They had believed this before, but now things being of another appearance, they call it into question, as the words imply. They had the word of God, the word of Christ, which is now scripture to us, that Christ after his sufferings should rise the third day, Mat. xviii. And yet when this was come to pass, and they had divers testimonies of it, they doubt of the truth of his word, so that he upbraids them, Luke xxiv. 25, 26.

(3.) Not every blasphemy expressed. Saul forced some blasphemous expressions from the saints that he persecuted, Acts xxvi. To secure themselves from his rage, they utter some reproachful speeches against Christ, his truths, or ways.

(4.) It is not that particular blasphemy, Mat. xii., in the matter and substance of it, if it be without that attendant, which formalised and aggravated it to that height in those Pharisees (though it has been of late otherwise determined). This to me is an evident reason of it. All the Jews, or others, who knew that Christ wrought these miracles, and yet did not receive or acknowledge him to be the Messiah, I see not how they could avoid that blasphemy, at least in thought. For knowing that he wrought such miracles, and that they were wrought to testify that he was the Messiah, either they thought that he did them by the Spirit and power of God, and then how could they choose but believe that he was the Christ, without running into as great a blasphemy, by thinking that the Spirit of God would give such a testimony to a lie? And it is evident many of them did not believe him then to be the Messiah, being not converted till after his death. Or else they thought he did those miracles by some other spirit and power than that of God. No third thing can be imagined. And what other spirit and power could that be, but the same to which those Pharisees blasphemously ascribe it? Yet they might do that ignorantly, which those Pharisees did against conviction. And so, though they were guilty of blaspheming the Holy Ghost, yet not of that unpardonable blasphemy, though it was materially the same blasphemy, yet wanted that ingredient, which does formalise it into the unpardonable sin.

Yea, it seems probable to me, that Paul before his conversion was guilty of this particular blaspheming materially considered, as before expressed; that he ascribed those miracles to the working of Satan. Which may thus appear: he could not but know that Christ wrought miracles; this was generally known and acknowledged by those of his own sect, the Pharisees. It was not denied by the most malicious enemies that Christ had, John xi. 47. It is like Saul was an eye-witness of some of them, coming to the passover (as all such were bound to do), when Christ wrought many of his miracles, Mat. xxi. 14. At least he could not but know that the apostles wrought miracles; and they were done expressly to confirm this truth, that Jesus was the Messiah. Either then he thought these miracles were done by the Spirit of God, and then he had been convinced that Jesus was the Christ; but this he says he was ignorant of while he was a persecutor. And since he thought them not done by the Spirit of God, what spirit could he think they were done by, but Beelzebub, that evil spirit? Now this was materially the very blasphemy of the Pharisees his associates.

And indeed he confesses he was a blasphemer, 1 Tim. i. 13, but adds, that which hindered his blasphemy from being that unpardonable blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, 'I did it ignorantly.' He did not know, he did not believe, that Jesus, whom he persecuted and blasphemed, was the Christ, acted and testified of by the Holy Ghost. If the rest of the Pharisees had done it ignorantly too, as he did, for anything I can see, their blasphemy had not risen up to the height of that sin which is declared to be unpardonable. So that, in fine, that particular blasphemy, Mat. xii., is not the unpardonable sin, but when it is against knowledge and conviction.

5. Every denying and renouncing of Christ, when it is against knowledge and conviction, is not the sin against the Holy Ghost. For Peter denied and renounced Christ, when he clearly knew, and was convinced that he was the Christ; when he fully believed it, and had openly professed and acknowledged it, Mat. xvi. 16. He denies him after admonition, denies him openly and scandalously, and this with cursing and swearing, against conscience, former resolutions, solemn engagements. A horrid sin indeed! Yet Peter repented, was pardoned. This was not the sin against the Holy Ghost. There was something of infirmity in it. He did it out of fear and passion, not wilfully, not presumptuously.

6. Every presumptuous sin is not the sin against the Holy Ghost. Though this be a sin of high provocation, and all persons, especially the people of God, are highly concerned to watch against it, as David, Ps. xix. 12. The Seventy render it, *καὶ ἀλλοτριῶν*, and vulgar, *ab alienis*, from strange sins. They are sins to which the people of God should be wholly strangers; and yet David himself was not altogether a stranger to it. There was too much presumption in those sins of adultery and murder. This latter especially was wilful, against knowledge and conscience, upon deliberation. He compassed not the death of Uriah, but by a series of plots and contrivances succeeding one another. And see how the prophet charges him, 2 Sam. xii. 9. In that he charges him with the despising the commandment of the Lord, he accuses him of sinning presumptuously. For this is the very phrase, by which the Holy Ghost expresses a presumptuous sin, Num. xv. 30, 31. And it is expressed by the same phrase, Heb. x. 28. A heinous sin indeed! There was no sacrifice for this sin under the law. If a man sinned ignorantly, an atonement might have been made for him by a sacrifice, so the Lord appointed. But if a man sinned presumptuously, no sacrifice was appointed, none could be accepted in lieu of his life, he was to die without mercy. This was a grievous sin indeed, yet not unpardonable; so David found it. But there is something more grievous in the sin against the Holy Ghost. For the apostle argues there from the less to the greater; from that as a less sin, to this as a greater, Heb. x. 28, 29. He that sins against the Holy Ghost (for he is describing that wickedness), shall be thought worthy of much sorer punishment, than he that, sinning presumptuously, despises Moses's law. And why worthy of much sorer punishment, but because it is a much more grievous sin? The sin against the Holy Ghost is not a sin of presumption only, but something more, something worse; something that has in it more provocation, and shall have sorer punishment.

Obj. 7. Faith is an application of the promise; the promise is conditional. And there are none have any ground to apply the promise, but they that have the condition, that is, it upon which the promise is suspended. Now, alas! I have not the condition, and what ground have I to apply the

promise? I have no ground to believe. To apply the promise without ground, is not to believe, but to presume. It would be groundless presumption in me to offer it.

*Ans. 1.* Faith may be without the application of a promise. This cleared, the main foundation of this scruple falls. Now it is clear, both from the principal object and the first acts of faith.

The principal *object* of faith is *quid incomplexum*, it is Christ himself, not a proposition nor a promise; so that, if there be no promise which thou canst apply, yet is there an object for thy faith. Christ may be embraced, though not in a promise. It is true Christ must be discovered and offered, before he can be the object of faith; but so he may be in other parts of the word, not in the promise only. The whole gospel discovers and propounds Christ to sinners; the promises are but some parts of the gospel. The promise is not the only or the principal object of faith, but Christ himself.

And it is clear from the *acts* of faith too. The first acts of faith are acceptance of, or dependence on Christ, not the application of a promise. The application of a conditional promise is for assurance, and that is a consequent of faith, or faith in its growth and elevation, not in its first actings, Eph. i. The Spirit seals the promise to a soul by application, but that is after believing; some acts of faith go before it. The first act of believing is a hearty acceptance of Christ for a Lord and Saviour, or a soul's dependence on him for pardon and holiness. Indeed, these are both one; for to take Christ for a Lord and Saviour, which I call acceptance, and to commit myself to him, to be pardoned and governed by him, which is dependence, is the same thing.

You say you have no ground to apply the promise; well, but have you no ground to accept of Christ as he is offered, to apply yourselves to him for pardon and life, to commit your souls to him to be saved and ruled by him? have you no ground for this? Why, the command of God is a sufficient ground for this, he enjoins you to do it. The promise has a condition, you say, and the want of it hinders you from applying the promise. Ay, but what condition has the command to hinder you from obeying? Will not the Lord be obliged but upon condition? Is he not absolute Lord?

You say you may not apply the promise; but may you not give your consent that Christ shall be your Lord and husband, and rest on him accordingly? Why, this is it you are called to do; do but this heartily, and you believe on the Son, though you cannot apply the promise, John i. The receiving of Christ is the heart's consent to take him upon his own terms; and this is believing. Where this is there is faith, though there be no application of a promise.

*Ans. 2.* There are absolute promises, to which no condition is annexed; general offers of Christ, not restrained to special qualifications, Isa. xlviii. 9, Jer. xxxiii. 8, Micah vii. 18, Ezek. xxxvi. 26, Rev. xxi. 17. Now, though the want of the condition hinder a sensible sinner from applying conditional promises, yet why should want of the condition hinder him from applying those promises that have no conditions? I speak to those that are sensible and humbled; for secure and presumptuous sinners are too apt to catch at these, and thereby to harden and encourage themselves in their presumption, to their ruin; such have neither share nor lot in this encouragement. But for the humbled sinner, who is weary of sin, and would count it the greatest mercy to be rid of it, the way to these promises is set open to

them. They were so delivered on purpose for their encouragement. To these I speak: Though ye cannot apply a conditional promise, yet can you not apply yourselves to Christ in an absolute promise? May you not apply Christ to yourselves in those free and general offers, wherein the Lord tenders him to you?

These are sufficient grounds of dependence, if not of assurance; sufficient encouragements to receive Christ, though not to apply him and rejoice in him as already received; sufficient to make him yours, if sons.\* These offers will make him yours if you will close with them, though not prove him yours; that follows acceptance.

If a man should hold out his hand and offer you a jewel, you would think that a sufficient ground to take it, though he should not express by any special qualifications that he intended it for you in particular; nay, though he should speak never a word, yet being one who is not wont to delude any, his holding it out and offering it to you would be a sufficient encouragement to receive it. So it is here, the Lord holds out Christ to humbled sinners in the general offers of the gospel; and he is never wont to delude any, much less those that are returning to him. Is not his offer a sufficient ground for you to receive what he offers? If you cannot apply him upon promised conditions, yet may you not receive him offered freely? But 'whosoever will,' &c., close with that word, come and embrace Christ as he is offered; and in so doing you believe, though you cannot apply any other promise.

*Ans. 3.* The least degree of the condition in sincerity shews title to the promise. Perfection is required by the law, but it is not the condition of any promise of the gospel; perfection would be acceptable under the gospel, but sincerity is accepted. The gospel would have us strive after perfection, but it has pardon for imperfections; it has promises to the least degrees in truth, when accompanied with greatest imperfections, Mat. xii. 20. Though there be but in the soul a spark from heaven, more smoke than heat, almost smothered in corruptions and imperfections, yet this has the promise. Not to quench is to kindle, not to break is to strengthen; a *μείωσις*, where much more is intended than expressed, Mat. v. What less degree of righteousness or holiness than a sincere desire of it! Yet this has the promise of satisfaction and blessedness. And lest this should be thought a high degree of desire, it is expressed by willingness. It may be the sensible sinner concludes he wants the condition, because he has it not in such or such a degree, and then the discouragement is raised upon a mistake. The least degree shews thy right to the promise.

*Ans. 4.* He that has the condition of any one promise has title to all the promises; to all, except those which are made upon some special and singular account; for he that has the condition of any one promise is in Christ. And in Christ 'all the promises are yea and amen;' they shall all be accomplished to such a one faithfully and certainly. He that has the condition of any one promise is thereby admitted into the covenant of grace, the league with Christ. Now, the promises are so many several articles of the covenant, and he that is in league and covenant with Christ shall have the benefit of all the articles; he may upon that ground plead his right thereto.

The covenant is made up of so many promises, as a golden chain of so many links; one link draws with it all the whole chain. He that has hold of

Qu. 'sinners'?—Ed.

one, by virtue of that he has hold of all. Indeed, he that has the condition of any one promise, has the conditions of all the promises really; if not in his own apprehensions, in one degree or other, in principle or in act. For every condition of a promise evangelical is some gracious quality, or some act of such a quality. Now, as there is a concatenation of vices (as moralists), so there is a connection of graces (as divines). They are never found single, they are never divided; the soul that is possessed of one is possessed of all.

The sensible soul may be apt to conclude he has no qualification and no condition of any promise; it is because he has not such and such; but this is a great mistake, and he herein discourages himself from applying the promise without ground; for if he has any one, he has all and every one indeed, though not in his own apprehension; for they are never really divided.

*Ans. 5.* You may have the condition though you discern it not. It may be discernible in you though you do not see it, will not acknowledge it. Here is one difference between the humbled and secure sinner; the secure confident will conclude he has those qualifications which he never had; the humbled is apt to conclude he has them not when he is in possession of them. You cannot persuade those but they have that which they have not; you cannot persuade these that they have that which indeed they have. The least degree of the condition is not easily discernible; for that which is least is next to nothing, and it must be a quick eye that can discern that; and when it is come to be discernible by others, yet it is not easily discerned by himself; in that dejected state he is not apt to believe it; he has had such a sight and sense of his sinfulness and misery as hath brought himself quite out of conceit with himself, so he is more apt to suspect the worst than to believe anything that is good concerning himself; and, therefore, if the humbled soul would not mistake, he should not judge himself till he has duly examined, not pass sentence before a just trial.

And because he is more apt to mistake himself, he should consult with those who have more light to discover it, and will more impartially judge of it. Let me propound a question or two for trial: Hast thou not forsaken every sin? Is not thy heart resolved against every evil way? Doest not thou confess, bewail, and set thyself against every sin? Why, this is the condition of a promise, Prov. viii. 18. Wouldst thou not come to Christ if he would entertain thee? Wouldst thou not leave every by-path, how pleasant soever, wherein thou hast lost him? Doest not thou heartily consent to come to Christ upon those terms on which he calls thee? Why, this is a condition of a promise, John vi.

*Ans. 6.* Go to Christ for the condition. Believe, and you have the condition.

IV. It remains that I should shew by what means faith may be attained. Faith is the gift of God, but he gives it in his own way. Those that would come by it must walk in this way. If you would receive this gift, set yourselves in that way wherein he is wont to communicate it.

Faith is the work of God. But he works it not immediately, but in the use of appointed means. He can work it without means, but he will not do so ordinarily. It will be presumption to expect extraordinary acts, while the ordinary way is open.

The means prescribed cannot effect faith of themselves. They are no further effectual, than as instruments in the hand of him who is the prin-

cial cause. They can do nothing without him. But usually he does nothing in this business without them. It is his power that works faith; but in that way, and by those means, which he has prescribed. Though he has not absolutely tied and confined himself to them, yet he has tied and confined us. Though he is free, yet the means are necessary to us.

I shall but instance in two, viz., prayer, and hearing the word; and will endeavour to shew you that they are means appointed for this end; and withal how you may use them so as this end may be attained, laying down some particular directions for this purpose.

1. For *prayer*, that one way wherein the Lord will be sought, and wherein he may be found. That is one means which the Lord will have used for this end, Ezek. xxxvi. 26. Here is a promise of the first grace, under the notion of a new heart. He promises conversion and regeneration, of which faith is a principal part. But in what way will he accomplish this and those other promises? What means will he have used for this end? That he shews, ver. 87.

So Saul, after he was humbled and struck down in an extraordinary way, before his conversion was completed by the Lord concurring with the ministry of Ananias, before he was filled with the Holy Ghost, we find him seeking of God, Acts ix. 11. The Lord takes notice of this in Saul, and will have Ananias to take notice of it, to encourage him in his work. Here is the way wherein this chosen vessel was carried. And you see, both by precept and example, that it is your way; if ever you would meet with faith, walk in it. It concerns every sinner who is not careless of his soul, who has any regard of everlasting life, any fear of everlasting death, any care of his eternal state, who is not desperately regardless of all that is dearest to him, to be seeking God for faith. For upon this are the issues of life and death. You especially, to whom the Lord has shewed so much mercy, as to shew you your want of faith, your necessity of it, your misery without it, be diligent, be importunate with God in prayer, that he would give you faith. Whatever you do, pray; whatever you pray for, pray for faith especially. The life of your souls depends on it.

Pray diligently. Spend that time in prayer which you have been wont to mis-spend in idleness, in vanities, in unnecessary employments. You have thrown away too much time already; that which remains is short, you know not how short. Labour to redeem it. Redeem time from your vanities and recreations, from your worldly business, yea, from your meat and sleep, rather than want time to seek God for this. For faith is of far more concernment to you than the world, than your pleasures, yea, than your meat and sleep, than your bodies and lives; the everlasting life of soul and body depends on faith. The wrath of God is more dreadful than poverty and wants, yea, than death itself. And till you believe, the wrath of God abides on you. Oh then seek God for this, above all things seek him, seek him night and day, give him no rest, &c.

Pray importunately. Seek faith of God, as a condemned malefactor would beg a pardon. There is no pardon without faith. Seek this of God, as one that feels and sees a sword at his breast, sees death present before his eyes, would sue for his life. There is no life for you without faith. Fall down before God, and cry to him as for life, Oh give me faith, else I die! I may live without friends, or wealth, or honours, or pleasures; but I cannot live without faith. There is nothing but death for me in unbelief. Lord, whatever thou deny me, deny me not faith. I am lost, undone, I perish, I am a dead man, without faith. It had been

better I had never been born, than to live in unbelief; the wrath of God abides on me, while I abide in this woeful state; and so it is like to abide on me for ever. I shall never see life, unless I believe; there is no hope for me till then. My case is miserable and desperate till I believe, and I can never believe unless thou give me faith. Lord, give me faith, or else I die. Get the sense of your misery without faith, and let this stir you up to be importunate. Content not yourselves to seek it in a careless, heartless, formal way; but seek it as that on which the life and happiness of your souls depends.

*Obj.* But what ground has he to pray, who is an unbeliever? His prayer is sin: 'The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord,' Prov. xv. What encouragement has he that his prayer may be heard, who cannot pray in faith? What has he to plead for himself, either for audience or acceptance, who has no promise to be heard, who has no interest in the intercession of Christ for acceptance? It seems either that prayer is not his duty, or else that he has no encouragement to perform it.

This is a difficulty which may be of very dangerous consequence, if it be not removed. There is that wrapt in it, which is apt to mislead some in their judgments, others in their practice, and that in a way very injurious and dishonourable to God, very dangerous and pernicious to the souls of men. And therefore it highly concerns us to remove this stumbling-block, and satisfy this scruple, which Satan may make such a great advantage of, both against God and men. That this may be done clearly and fully, I shall (1.) shew the ground of the objection is a mistake; (2.) prove that prayer is a necessary duty to unbelievers; (3.) shew that they have encouragement to pray; (4.) what pleas they may use for themselves in begging for faith. For the

(1.) The ground of the objection is this, that the prayer of an unbeliever is sin, that it is a sin for him to pray; and hence it is inferred, that he ought not to pray. That the mistake herein may appear, observe,

[1.] Though an unbeliever sin in praying, yet it is not a sin for him to pray. There is sin in the manner of his praying; but prayer, as to the act and substance of it, is his duty. He sins, not because he prays, that is required of him, but because he prays amiss, not in that manner that is required of him. There are abominations in the prayers of a wicked man, but for him to pray is not an abomination, it is the good and acceptable will of God, that which he commands. He commands him to pray, and he sins not in complying with the command, so far it is obedience; but he prays not as he ought to do, there is his sin. Now he should leave his sin, not his duty. He should pray better in another manner, that is all which can be inferred, not that he should not pray at all. For so he leaves not his sin, but his duty. A boy is learning to write; he scribbles at first untowardly, makes, it may be, more blots than letters. It is his fault that he blots, not that he writes, that is his duty; in this case you would have him leave blotting, not leave writing. So here, the act of prayer is a duty, but the manner of performing this act, therein is the fault; this should be corrected, but the act should not be omitted. Ay, but since an unbeliever cannot perform his duty in the manner that he ought, were it not as good he should not perform it at all? No, not so. For observe,

[2.] An undue performing is better than a total neglect. Better he should do what he can in a way of obedience than do nothing at all; better pray as he can, though he cannot pray as he ought, than not pray at all.



If your servant do what you command, you like it better (though he do it not in that manner, and for that end which you desire) than if he should refuse to obey you at all.

An unbeliever sins, whether he pray or pray not. Such a woeful necessity has sin brought him into, that he cannot but sin, whatever he does. But in this case the less evil must be chosen. Now when the Lord enjoins a duty, not to do it at all is a total disobedience; to do it in an undue manner is but a partial disobedience. Not to do the act is a wilful disobedience; to fail in the manner of doing it is an unavoidable disobedience. Now a total disobedience is far worse than that which is but partial; a wilful disobedience is far more provoking than an unavoidable failing. He may do the act if he will; if he do it not, he wilfully rebels: he cannot do it as he ought, his falling short therein is that which cannot be avoided. So it is far more excusable, far less sinful, to pray as he can, than not to pray at all. His best is bad enough; yet he must do his best, else he sins more, and shall suffer more.

[8.] If an unbeliever must not pray, because he sins in praying, then believers themselves must not pray for this reason too, because they also sin in praying. 'In many things we offend all,' James iii. 2. 'All their righteousness is as a menstruous rag,' Isa. lxiv. 6. The best of them, when they do their best, fall far short of praying in that manner as they ought; they sin in the manner themselves.

Oh, but they sin less herein than unbelievers.

I answer, If they may pray, though they sin in praying, because they sin less; by the same reason unbelievers may pray, because they sin less in praying than in omitting prayer, as before.

[4.] If an unbeliever may not pray, because he sins in praying, then by the same reason he must not do any thing at all, because he cannot do any thing in the world, but in doing of it he sins. He must not do any thing spiritual, or civil, yea, or natural; for he sins in all as much as in praying. He must not read, nor hear the word (though this be the plain duty of heathens and infidels), because not mixing the word with faith, he sins in that. He must not work, not do the necessary duties of his calling (if this were a sufficient reason) for he sins in that, Prov. xxi. 4. He must not eat; for that ensnares him in sin. His table is a snare. He must not speak; for therein he sins, Prov. xii. 18. He must not walk or converse with men, for even his way is an abomination, Prov. xv. 9.

Now if this be absurd, that an unbeliever must not hear, nor work, nor speak, nor eat, nor move, notwithstanding he sins in all these (as indeed there can scarce any greater absurdity fall into the imagination of a man), then it is absurd that an unbeliever must not pray, notwithstanding he sins in praying. If that woeful necessity of sinning in all these will not hinder any of them from being his duty, no more can it hinder prayer from being his duty. This may be sufficient to shew the vanity of the objection, the mistake of the ground upon which it is raised.

(2.) The necessity of it. Prayer is a necessary duty to wicked men and unbelievers; and that will appear many ways. But briefly:

[1.] The Lord's express commands directed to such, enjoining them to seek him and call upon him, Isa. lv. 6. It is taken by many to be an exhortation directed to the Gentiles not yet converted; and so prayer is a duty before conversion; but whether it be Gentiles or Jews for whom it is intended, it is for such as are wicked and unrighteous, as appears, ver. 7. Wicked and unrighteous men are enjoined to seek God, and call upon him,

and those that are such in a high degree. The most abominable sinner in the world is called the man of sin, and that is the expression here; the 'unrighteous' is in the original the 'man of iniquity.' So Acts viii., Peter lays the injunction upon Simon Magus, when he knew him to be a graceless wretch, ver. 21, 23. He directs him to pray, ver. 22.

[2.] Neglect of prayer by unbelievers is threatened. The prophet's imprecation is the same in effect with a threatening, Jer. x. 25, and the same imprecation, Ps. lxxix. 6. The prophets would not have used such an imprecation against those that call upon God, but that their neglect of calling on his name makes them liable to his wrath and fury; and no neglect makes men liable to the wrath of God but the neglect of duty. Prayer then is a duty even to the heathen, the neglect of which provokes him to pour out his fury on them.

[8.] We have examples for it in Scripture, such as are unquestionable. The example of the prophets by divine instinct calling wicked men to this duty, Joel i. 14, all the inhabitants; and yet many of the inhabitants were extremely wicked, such as deserved to be cut off both from church and state, and such as the Lord is threatening to cut off by a destroying judgment, ver. 15. And yet all these must join in prayer, he leaves no scruple for joining in this duty with wicked men; yea, sucking children must join too, lest any think that little ones have nothing to do with prayer, Joel ii. 16.

[4.] The Lord charges the neglect of this duty upon wicked men as a heinous crime; as that which involves them, or shews them to be involved, in the greatest and most horrible guilt.

*First.* He charges it as an act of pride and contempt of God, Ps. x. 4. If prayer be not the duty of wicked men, then pride and contempt of God is no sin. The connection which the Holy Ghost makes between these does make this evident.

*Secondly.* It is charged as the casting off all fear of God, which is the height of profaneness, Job. xv. 4. If it be not a duty for all to pray, it is not a sin to cast off all fear of God.

*Thirdly.* It is charged as atheism, one of the characters by which the atheist is described, Ps. xiv. 1, 2. Those that do not seek God, say in their hearts there is no God. So ver. 4. Who are they that say in their hearts there is no God? Why, he describes them to be such as call not upon the Lord. This is a plain sign of speculative, a principal act of practical atheism. So Psalm x. It may be read, 'All his thoughts are, there is no God.' He that will not seek after God, does hereby shew that all his thoughts are, there is none. Those that would not have all men to pray, would have all men to be atheists. Atheism is not a sin, if calling on God be not their duty.

[5.] This will appear, if we consider what prayer is, in these particulars.

*First.* It is an act of respect and honour due to God from every man by the light of nature. It is not an act of positive and instituted worship, peculiar to the church and the true members thereof, as the seals of the covenant are; but it is an act of natural worship due from men, not as they are Christians, but as they are men; and so due from men always, and indispensably due. No sinfulness can disoblige any man from his duty; no, nor anything else but that which makes him cease to be a man; for that which is due by the law of nature is of eternal obligation; and we see the light of nature led the mariners in Jonah to this duty, though those heathens had no revealed light, no knowledge of Scripture.

Those that would not have wicked men to pray, would not have them give that honour and respect to God which is due by the light and dictate of nature.

*Further.* Prayer is an acknowledgment of your dependence upon God: Ps. lxxix. 6. 'That acknowledge thee not, by calling on thy name.' The plain import of prayer is to acknowledge that all we have we receive it from God, and that all we want we expect it from God alone. Now, if it were [not the duty of unbelievers to pray, it would not be their duty to acknowledge their dependence on the Lord; not to acknowledge that he is God, and that they are creatures; that in him they live and move, and have their being; that every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of lights; but that they might have these without him.

*Finally.* Prayer, if we consider it in its essence and nature, is a motion which the soul makes to God; it is the soul's desire of what it asks; it is but the turning God's commands into requests. Now, if it were not the duty of unbelievers to pray, it is not their duty to desire to please God, to know him, to obey him. To instance in that which is for our present purpose. If it be not the duty of unbelievers to pray for faith, it is not their duty to desire faith; for prayer is essentially a desire, &c. When the Lord has declared that without faith it is impossible to please him, it would not be their duty to desire to please him. When he has declared that faith gives glory to God, it would not be their duty to desire to glorify him. When he has declared this to be his commandment, that they believe, &c., it would not be their duty to desire to obey him, and to comply with his revealed will. When he has declared that he that believes not makes God a liar, it would not be their duty to desire not to give God the lie.

If it be a necessary duty for unbelievers to desire these things, it is their necessary duty to pray for them; for prayer essentially is nothing but the soul's desire.

(3.) I shall endeavour to shew what encouragement a man, yet without faith, may have to address himself to the Lord in prayer.

He has no such encouragement as the Lord offers to believers; but some encouragement he hath, especially a sensible sinner, one who is in the way to faith, though he be not yet arrived at it. I will give you an account of this in some particulars. And herein I shall not leave the good old way, though the path wherein I walk may seem solitary.

[1.] He may find some acceptance with God, some kind of acceptance; not a full acceptance, so as his person shall be accepted with his prayer; for the person cannot be accepted till he be in Christ, and he is not in Christ but by faith; and so the person of an unbeliever cannot be accepted.

Nor is it an absolute acceptance; for in that sense, 'without faith it is impossible to please God;' he cannot please him absolutely. But he may find in his prayer a comparative acceptance, and that both negatively;—the Lord is not so much displeased with his prayers, though there be sin in them, as with other sinful acts. He was not so much displeased with Ahab humbling himself, as with his other wickedness. A less degree of displeasure is something considerable; it may bear the name of acceptance by some warrant from Scripture; for as a less degree of love is called hatred, Luke xiv. 26, so a less degree of displeasedness may be called acceptance.

We may express it positively too. The Lord is more pleased with the

prayers of such, than he is with not only their open sins, but than he is with other acts that have a show of goodness. For as acts of sin against the first table are more heinous, and do more provoke God, than acts of sin against the second, so, in proportion, acts of obedience to the precepts of the first table, such as prayer, being an act of worship immediately respecting God, are more pleasing to him than acts of justice or charity respecting men.

Such acts of worship, though in unbelievers, they are not spiritually good; yet there may be a moral goodness in them, which is pleasing and acceptable to God, so far forth that he likes the work, and approves it with that common allowance which he affords to all things done in compliance with his will, and bearing any stamp of his own goodness; though not so much as to accept the person, and receive it into any special favour. He has a common acceptance for common and moral goodness, and the more by how much the more it respects himself; and acts of worship, such as prayer, respect him more than others. When there is a moral and common affection and sincerity in prayer, Gen. xx. 6, as some yet in unbelief may have, though not a special and spiritual affection, the Lord likes it, and accepts it, so far as it is the work and effect of his own common grace. This our divines grant in their contests with the Arminians. (*Vid.* Pemble, p. 88.)

Now this is some encouragement to pray. You cannot do anything in unbelief more pleasing to God. You displease him more when you neglect prayer: he has a comparative liking of them, a common acceptance and approbation for them.

[2.] The Lord may hear such prayers; he may so far accept them as to hear them. Though he have not engaged himself by promise to do it, yet he has not tied up himself, so as he may not do it. Though an unbeliever have no promise, and so no certainty that his prayers shall succeed, yet he has some probability; there is some likelihood that they will not miscarry. He has a *may be* for it, and that is counted encouragement enough to act in other cases. Peter gives this encouragement even to Simon Magus to pray, Acts ix. 22. He determines it not against him, but leaves in suspense a question undecided for or against him; possibly thy sin may not be forgiven, but perhaps it may be forgiven, prayer may prevail for pardon. The men of Nineveh were hereby encouraged to pray, Jonah iii. 9. It is not certain he will, it is not certain he will not; he may, for anything we know. They had thus much, and no more encouragement, in Joel ii. 14.

The people of God sometimes find no more encouragement than such a *may be*, Amos v. 15. Caleb expresses no more, Jos. xiv. 12. You count this an encouragement enough to put you upon moral endeavours, and why not upon prayer? Though it be not certain that he will hear and answer, yet he may hear and answer; there is nothing certain to the contrary. Soldiers do continually venture their lives, and merchants do constantly venture their estates, when they have no surer ground to succeed. And is not this encouragement enough to engage in a necessary duty?

[8.] The Lord does many times answer the prayers of unbelievers. We have many examples hereof in Scripture. It is not only a *may be*, but we see it actually done. Ishmael is represented to us as a persecutor, and as one excluded from Abraham's spiritual seed, Gal. iv. 29, and yet the Lord heard his cry in the day of his extremity, Gen. xxi. 17. The mariners in Jonah are expressed to be heathens and idolaters, yet seeking God importunately that he would not let them perish for Jonah's life, whom they

cast into the sea, Jonah i. 14, and we have the return of their prayer in the next ver. 15, 'The sea ceased,' &c.; so the men of Nineveh, whose wickedness was gone up to heaven; yet crying unto the Lord, he was entreated, and answers them graciously, Jonah iii. 10. Yea, Ahab, the wickedest king that ever Israel had, though they had few or none but such as were wicked after the division, yet none like him, 1 Kings xxi. 25. Yet when he humbled himself, and sought God, he prevailed; and he sends him an answer of his prayer by the prophet, who had denounced the wrath of God against him, ver. 28, 29.

So that the Lord hears the prayers of such who have less ground to hope for any such thing than the sensible sinner. Here is that which may encourage all to pray, but here is more encouragement for such a one; he may fare better, when the worst fare so well.

[4.] The Lord has more respect to those prayers that are made for spiritual mercies than petitions put up for temporal blessings; such are more pleasing to him, more according to his will, and he manifests it by making readier returns thereto. He has expressed his liking and approbation of prayers, not so much in respect to the person praying as in respect to the things prayed for, and has answered them upon this account. There is a notable instance hereof in his acceptance of Solomon's petition, 1 Kings iii. 10-12. The Lord was well pleased with his prayer because of the thing that he prayed for, ver. 10; and because he asked an understanding heart, and not such things as nature is more apt to desire; upon this account the Lord grants his request, ver. 11, 12, and that with an over-plus, ver. 18. Yet this seems to be but a moral accomplishment, an endowment that might fitly qualify him as a magistrate to discern between right and wrong, good and bad, to do judgment and justice.

And if the Lord be better pleased with petitions for moral accomplishments than with those for riches, or long life, and outward success, by consequence he may be better pleased with prayers for spiritual blessings than those for moral accomplishments; if he be so ready to hear prayers for moral virtues, he may be more ready to hear prayers for spiritual graces. Corrupt nature has less inclination to these, the Lord is more honoured by them, and is more pleased with them. What an encouragement is this for those that want faith, to pray for it; being the chief spiritual accomplishment, and that which is the root of the rest. What hopes are here, that such requests will be heard and granted. What encouragement that such a request will please the Lord, when that very thing is asked which is most pleasing to him.

[5.] If unbelievers should seek spiritual blessings of God, as far as natural men may do, the Lord would seldom or never reject their requests. I do not only say he would not ordinarily deny them, but he would seldom or never deny them. But this must be taken cautiously. It must be observed that few, or rather none, in the state of unbelief, do seek for spiritual blessings to the utmost of their ability, as far as they may do. It is likely that sensible sinners come nearest to this; but even they, when they stretch out their endeavours farthest, do fall short of what they might do; when they do most, they do not their utmost. And it must be farther observed, that if natural men should do their utmost, yet this would not oblige the Lord to confer grace on them. No prayers or endeavours of natural men whatsoever, not the utmost improvement of the power of nature herein, can lay any engagement upon God; but he remains free, when all is done, to bestow grace or deny it. This we hold firm against Pelagians of

all sorts and sizes. But yet we say there cannot be an instance given of any one man in the world that ever sought God so far as a natural man may do for spiritual blessings, and was notwithstanding denied and rejected. Such an example cannot be produced, nor hath it yet fallen under any man's observation. There seems to be an instance to the contrary in Esau, but it is a mistake, Heb. xii. 14. For this was a repentance in his father, not a repentance in himself, that he sought so carefully and so passionately. The word *μετάνοια*, rendered repentance, signifies a change of the mind; and this was it which he sought of his father, to change his father's mind. Isaac, his father, had given the blessing to Jacob, his brother; he would have his father change his mind as to this particular, and give the blessing, not to his brother, but to him. This was the repentance that he sought; he would have Isaac repent of this, that he had given the blessing of the first-born to the younger brother, Gen. xxvii. Now as this consideration clears up the justice of God in his proceedings against sinners, since none perish but such as do not what in them lies, do not their utmost to be saved, so it gives a great encouragement to all, especially to sensible sinners, to stir up themselves to seek faith, seeing no instance can be given of any who sought it of God, so far as a natural man may do, that ever miscarried, or were rejected. It cannot be observed that any man ever sought it so far as his power would reach, and so far as he was hereto moved by the Spirit of God, and yet fell short of faith; it hath not been observed that such prayers did not succeed.

[6.] The Lord does more respect the prayers of those for whom he has designed faith, when they seek him for it, than the prayers of others. Their persons and prayers are not fully accepted till they actually believe, but their requests are more accepted than their prayers for other things, or the prayers of other men. And there is special reason for it; for the Lord has some love for them even before they believe; not that which is called *amor complacentiæ*, the love of complacency and delight, for so he affects none but those that actually believe, and are thereby brought into a state of union with Christ, and reconciliation to God; but he affects such with that love which is called *amor benevolentia*, a love of good will; he bears them a secret good will, though he do not yet express it. He has an inclination to do them good, it is his purpose to bestow faith and those spiritual blessings on them which they are praying for. Now their prayers concurring with his own purpose, and being agreeable both to his revealed and his secret will as to the matter of them, must needs be so far acceptable.

Besides, Christ has purchased faith and spiritual blessings for those to whom the Father has designed them. And the intercession of Christ is, as it were, a continual representation of those sufferings whereby he has purchased these blessings for them, that by virtue thereof, they may be communicated in their season. Therefore, when such pray for faith, they pray for that which he did not only purchase, but for which he is then interceding. Now such prayers as go along with the intercession of Christ, and are interested in it, must needs be so far acceptable and prevail. He that is seeking that of God, for which Christ himself is interceding, will surely be heard. As redemption, so Christ's intercession is not only for actual believers, but for those of his chosen who want faith, that they may be made believers. The prayers of such for faith will be heard and answered, not by their own virtue, but by virtue of the intercession of Christ.

But what encouragement is all this, though very great in itself, to a sensible sinner, since he knows not, nor can know, that God has designed faith for him, and consequently knows not that the Lord bears any good will to him, or that Christ has any respect to him in his intercession?

I answer, whether he know it or no, these things, though hidden and secret, will have their effect, and they will have such an influence on his prayers as will render them so far accepted as to prevail for answer.

And farther, though he know not this certainly, for there can be no certainty of it till he believe actually, yet he has some probabilities for it, some probable grounds on which to hope it. The Lord has brought the sensible sinner into the way that leads to faith, he has given him a heart to use the means whereby faith is attained, he has carried him on so far as few go but those that reach. And these are fair probabilities that the Lord has designed faith for him, that he has a good will to give it him, and that Christ is interceding for this purpose.

Such encouragement there is even for unbelievers to pray for faith, such encouragement the sensible sinner has to seek God for it. It is not only his duty to pray, there is not only a necessity for it, but he may do it with great hopes to succeed. He has special encouragement, not only to pray diligently, importunately, but to carry him on cheerfully in this duty. And though this last consideration speak peculiarly to the humbled sinner, yet the other particulars encourage every sinner to be much and often in seeking God for faith.

(4.) What pleas may the sensible sinner use in prayer? What has he to plead for himself when he is seeking faith of God?

A believer indeed has many and strong pleas. He may plead the promise, whereby the Lord has engaged himself to hear him. He may plead the covenant, wherein the truth and faithfulness of God is engaged. He may plead the mediation of Christ, his purchase and intercession. He may plead Christ's relation to him as his friend, his brother, as his head, his husband. Here is strength in these pleas, and such as afford strong support. But what has the sensible sinner to plead, who has no interest in the covenant or promise, who knows not that Christ has any love for him, or any relation to him? Why, even he has many things to plead, though they come short to these; such as may make him fervent, importunate, and affectionate; such as may encourage him thereto, and support his heart therein. And these are the proper ends of using pleas in prayer. Not to move God, or make any impression on him, for such motion would infer some change, some alteration in God, and that is inconsistent with his perfection, who is without variableness or shadow of changing. But the use and end of them is to make impression on our own hearts, to work upon our affections, to stir us up to more fervency and importunity, and to afford some support and encouragement, that our hearts may not be dead and formal, and our spirits may not sink and faint in our addresses to God. Now the sensible sinner has many things which he may make use of for this purpose. He may plead,

[1.] His misery. How miserable he is without faith. I spread before you the miseries [of] an unbeliever in the first use. The sensible sinner may spread this before God, as Hezekiah did Rabshakeh's letter in his prayer. This was the plea which the man in the gospel used for his son, Mat. xvii. 15, 'My son is miserably vexed.' He lays open his misery, ver. 16, and this plea prevailed, ver. 18. As he pleaded for his son, plead thou for thy soul, lay open its miseries before Christ. Lord, what misery

is it to be excluded from life, to be dead while I live ! Unless thou give me faith, I shall never see life. What misery is it to be under wrath ! How great is my misery, who am under the wrath of the great God ! How unavoidable my misery, who am under abiding wrath ! What joy can I have in any enjoyment, when the wrath of God is mixed with all ! What comfort can my life be to me, when the wrath of God hangs continually over me ! Out of the depths cry unto God, out of the depths of that misery wherein unbelief has sunk thee. Lord, hear me ! bring my soul out of this mire and clay, out of unbelief, the pit wherein there is no water, no comfort, no refreshment, no relief. Thou takest no pleasure of the miseries of wretched creatures. It is no delight to thee that I am miserable, but rather that I should live. Lord, give me faith, or else I shall never see life ; give me faith, or else I shall be for ever miserable.

[2.] He may plead mercy. This was the publican's plea, Luke xviii. 18, and it prevailed, ver. 14. This is the proper plea for a sensible sinner, the suitableness, the largeness, the freeness of mercy. He may plead,

*First, The suitableness of mercy.* His misery, of which he is so sensible, renders mercy suitable to him. Misery is the proper object of mercy. Who is mercy for, if not for the miserable ? Mercy would be lost, it would be an useless perfection, an attribute without use or exercise, if it did not let out itself to misery ; for it has no other object, but those that are miserable.

*Secondly, The largeness of mercy,* Ps. cxlv. 9. His mercy is like the firmament spread over all this lower world ; and every inferior creature partakes more or less of its influence, according to its exigence and capacity. True, may he say, I have made myself, by sin, the vilest of all creatures ; I am become worse than the beasts that perish ; as vile as a worm, as loathsome as a toad, by reason of the venomous corruption that is in my heart, and this woeful contrariety to the nature of a holy God. But there is mercy over all, even over such vile and loathsome creatures as these ; there may be some over me, though wrath do now abide on me. Oh let that mercy, whose glory it is to stretch itself over all, reach my soul also ! Oh that the blessed and powerful influence thereof would beget faith in my heart !

*Thirdly, The freeness of mercy.* That is its nature, its genius. It needs no motive, it expects no worth nor value in its object, to draw it out. It runs freely ; no sin or unworthiness can stop the current of it. It is a great depth ; though there be a mountain of sin, it can cover and overflow it ; that can no more hinder the outflowings of mercy, than a rock can hinder the motions and flowings of the sea. Here is an encouraging plea for a sensible sinner. Lord, may he say, I have nothing to move thee to shew me mercy, nothing to engage thee to be gracious to me ; nothing but what may engage thee against me, to shut me out from mercy. Oh but free mercy can move itself ; it looks for no motive from without ; there is enough to move it in its own bowels. If sin and unworthiness may exclude a sinner from faith and mercy, I may lie down in sorrow and despair for ever. Oh but it is the glory of mercy to run freely, to flow out upon those that are most unworthy. Such am I, O Lord, the unworthiest of any ever sought faith in thee, that ever found mercy with thee. But the more unworthy, the more will it be for the glory of thy mercy that I perish not ; the more will the lustre and riches of thy grace appear, in giving me faith. Glorify thy mercy on such an object. Have mercy on me, O Lord, that I perish not.

[8.] He may plead his impotency, his own inability to believe, and the insufficiency of all things to help him to faith, unless the Lord help him.



This was the poor impotent man's plea; he that lay at the pool of Bethesda, John v. 6, 7, and it prevailed. Let this be thy plea. I have been sick of sin, nay, spiritually dead in unbelief many years; there is a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, a healing, sovereign virtue in that fountain, able to restore my soul to life and health. But, alas! I cannot move towards it of myself, and I have none to put me in. I have been a long time in this languishing condition, and I shall be so for ever, unless thou pity me. There is life for me in Christ, if I could but come to him, if I could but touch him; but such is my impotency, to such a low condition has sin brought my soul, that of myself I cannot come to Christ; I cannot move towards him, though I die for it. There is none come to him, unless the Father draw them. Lord, 'draw me, and I shall run after thee.' I would believe; 'Lord, help my unbelief.' Help, Lord; for vain is the help of man. There is no help for me in myself; there is no help for me in any creature. I am altogether helpless, I am utterly hopeless, unless the Lord help. Such is the violence of my distemper, such is the strength of my unbelief, as it is too hard for men or angels, it is too hard for all creatures, for all ordinances; nothing can overpower it but an infinite, an almighty power. Stretch out that almighty arm, and rescue my perishing soul from going down into destruction. This is a work beseeeming the greatness of that power which worketh wonders, to which nothing is impossible, nothing difficult. Is anything too hard for God? Lord, shew thyself to be God; shew forth thy glory, by doing that for me which men and angels, which heaven and earth cannot do for me. They all say to me, while they see me perishing, If the Lord do not help thee, how shall we help? Oh I have destroyed myself, but in thee alone is my help. The more helpless my condition is, the more will it be for thy glory to help me. In vain is salvation hoped for from the mountains, in vain is faith expected from prayers, from ordinances, &c.; it is the Lord alone can help me to faith. Help, Lord, for vain is all other help.

[4.] He may plead the will of God. He commands sinners to believe; he threatens them in case they will not believe; he declares that he is highly dishonoured by unbelief. He appointed his gospel to be preached, and sends messengers to preach it, for this very end, that sinners might be brought to faith. He complains when his report is not believed, and he is glorified by believing. All this makes it evident that it is his will the sensible sinner should believe. Hence he may encourage himself to pray for faith. Lord, I have been too long disobedient to the heavenly call, I have too long resisted thy holy will; but now I would comply with the will of God, so far as I know it. I have no way to know it but by the word, and that speaks plainly, it is thy command I should believe. Why, Lord, let thy will be done in my heart; let this law of faith be written in my inward parts. If it were not thy will, I durst not ask it, I could not expect it; but since it is thy will, Lord, let it be done on earth, as it is [in] heaven. What may be done, if the will of God may not be done? What may I seek for, if not for this, that thy will may be done? What may be obtained, if this will not be obtained, that the will of God may be fulfilled? If I should ask of thee riches, or long life, or great things for myself, this might be thought rather my will than thine; but it is thy will that I should believe: 'Lord, not my will, but thine be done.' Give me a heart to believe, that I may obey thee, for thou hast commanded it. Give me a heart to believe, that I may please thee, for thou hast declared it to be thy good pleasure. Give me a heart to believe, that I may honour thee, for thou hast declared

that gives glory to thee. He may plead this with great encouragement that his plea will prevail ; for what petitions will succeed, if not those which are for things according to his will, those wherewith he is best pleased, and things which tend most for his glory ? Though the person of a petitioner were distasteful to the prince, yet if his petition were for things that pleased him, and tended to the advancement of his honour and interest, and such as he had enjoined those that are least acceptable to him to sue for, in all probability they would be granted. So, though the person of the sensible sinner be not accepted in the sight of God, yet since, when he prays for faith, he petitions for that which is most acceptable to God, &c., there is great hopes they will succeed, there is much encouragement in such a plea.

[5.] He may plead the descent of faith, it is the gift of God : and the nature of this gift, it is a free gift. A gift, Philip. i. 29 ; a free gift, Eph. ii. 8. Not only salvation, but faith, the condition of salvation, the way to it, is *χαρίσμα*, a free gift. Hence the sensible sinner may argue, Faith is a gift, therefore it may be asked, sued for ; it is a free gift, and therefore it may be given to those that are unworthy ; and then, why not to me ? It is not to be bought or purchased, it is a gift ; it is not to be merited or deserved, it is a free gift. The Lord expects no such thing as price or merit : the nature of the benefit will not admit it. Now, may I not seek that which the Lord is wont to give ? May I not obtain that which is wont to be given freely ? It is a gift that comes from the Father of lights, who gives liberally, and upbraids no man. The sinner may set this against all that sinfulness, unworthiness, unpreparedness, which Satan usually suggests to the humbled soul, to hinder him from praying, or to cut him off from hopes of succeeding.

[6.] He may plead the examples of those who have obtained faith, and that against the greatest unlikelihoods and improbabilities that may be. Who would have thought that she, whose heart was the seat of seven devils, should ever have been made a receptacle for faith and the Holy Spirit of promise ? Who would have thought that those bloody wretches who crucified Christ should ever have found grace to believe, and entertain him in their hearts by faith ? Yet so did some thousands of them, Acts ii. Who would have thought that Saul, who was such a persecutor, such a blasphemer, should ever have found mercy to become a believer ? Yet he found mercy, and mercy to believe, and for this end that his example might be a standing plea for encouraging all that should believe after him to the end of the world, 1 Tim. i. 18, 15, 16.

[7.] He may plead his willingness to submit to any condition, the lowest, the meanest that can be, so he may but find this favour with the Lord. We find the prodigal making use of this, Luke xv. 18, 19. Lord, such a wretch as I have been, have little reason to expect that high relation of a son, that dear affection of a father, that is too much for one so unworthy. Only I would be thine, though in a lower relation ; I would belong to thee ; I would not be quite shut out from a father's house, though I can never look to be entertained as a child. Lord, do but entertain me, though in the lowest capacity, though in the meanest employment ; let me be thy servant, so I may but have a place in the family ; nay, let me be but the meanest of servants, a hired servant, no better used, no more respected. I will submit, I will be thankful, whatever my condition be, so I be not quite disowned. Lord, let me be thine, and it is enough, in what relation soever ; and that I may be thine, give me a heart to believe ; without faith I can have no interest in thee. This plea in the prodigal was

prevailing for more than he had the confidence to plead for, ver. 21. 22. The father's affection breaks out in the midst of the plea, and cuts him off there, would not let him vilify himself farther. Instead of using of him as a hired servant, he commands his servants to wait on him as his son. Such a plea was that of the woman of Canaan, Mat. xv. 26, 27.

[8.] He may plead Christ's prayer. He, when he was on earth, prayed for those that did not then, that do not yet believe, John xvii. 20. He prays not only for those who did actually, but for those who yet had not faith, for those who yet were not in the way to faith, for those who yet had no being. Now the sensible sinner is in a more hopeful condition than some of those for whom Christ prays; for he is in the way to faith, and that is a strong probability that he is one for whom Christ put up this petition. And for what does he pray? see ver. 21. He prays that they may have union with the Father and himself. Now the bond of this union is faith. He prays then that those who did not yet believe may have faith in him, and so union with him. He prays that sensible sinners may have faith. Now, though the Lord hear not sinners, yet he always hears his Son. He was heard in that which he feared, he cannot be denied in that which he desired. Here is a strong plea indeed. Methinks it should be strong enough, not only to confirm faith in those that have it, but to work faith in those that want it. Methinks it should be effectual, not only to persuade the humbled sinner to pray, but to believe; not only to pray with some hopes, but to pray in faith.

[9.] He may plead the compassions of Christ to hardened and rejected sinners. For from hence he may argue there are more compassions for him, Luke xix, 41, 42. This was the city who shewed such obstinacy in rejecting Christ, that he gives her over as one whose condition was desperate, of whom he had not hopes; and yet even for such he has some pity, which breaks out into tears. Now if Christ have such compassions for those who so long and so obstinately opposed him, that he sees cause to cast them off as utterly incurable, has he not some compassion for the sensible sinner, whose soul is struck with remorse for his former disobedience to Christ, and whose heart is inclining to yield to him? If he be so passionately touched with their condition, who are so rebellious as to refuse all further treaty with Christ, has he not compassions for those who are in parley with him, and are about to submit to him? This is the state of a sensible sinner, and this is a hopeful plea which he may draw from Christ's tenderness. If he have such pity for obstinate enemies, he has some affections for those that incline to be his friends. If he lament the unbelief of those, he may be ready to further the work of faith in these.

[10.] He may plead the workings of the Spirit already begun, though they be but initial and preparatory. In the sensible sinner there is some illumination, some conviction, some humiliation, some sorrow, some hopes, some desires, some endeavours after more. These look like the beginnings, the foundation of a greater work. Some strongholds of Satan are demolished, the rubbish is removing, the materials are preparing, the outworks are begun. Are not these in order to that spiritual structure which is the Spirit's master-piece, the work of faith? Now the Spirit of God does not use to leave his work imperfect, unfinished, but upon some great provocation. The sensible sinner may plead this: Lord, thou hast let in some light into my mind and conscience, let it not end in darkness; let it be like that light which shines more and more unto a perfect day. The Spirit of conviction has awakened my soul, Oh let it not end in a spirit of slumber.

There are some sparks of thy own kindling, let them not be extinguished. All thy works are perfect, let not this be unlike the rest, but carry it on to perfection.

[11.] He may plead the respect which the Lord shews to irrational creatures. He hears their cries, will he shut out the cry of my perishing soul? He hears them crying for food, will he not hear me for that which unconceivably more concerns me, for that without which my soul will die for ever? Ps. civ. 21, 27, cxlvii. 9, 10, cxlv. 15, 16. Does the Lord take care for oxen? 1 Cor. ix. 9. Will he take care of lions and ravens, and will he not regard my perishing soul?

[12.] He may plead his necessity, his extreme need of faith: Mat. ix. 12, 'The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.' O Lord, my soul is sick, sick unto death. Unbelief will be my death, it will be the eternal death of body and soul, unless the great physician undertake the cure. Will not he, who shewed so much compassion on diseased bodies, have some pity on a dying soul? 'Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?' I die, I perish, there is no help for me in heaven or earth, unless Christ will cure me; none else can cure me of unbelief. Though others pass by, and have no regard to see me wallowing in my blood, yet will the good Samaritan so pass by? Has he no compassion for me? He came to seek that which was lost, Luke xix. 10. I am lost, not only as the rest of the world, but I feel myself lost, will he not seek me whom he came to find? He is found of those that seek him not, will he not be found of me who seek him? Will he not be found of me whom he came to seek? shall a lost soul find him?

2. The other means for the attaining of faith is *hearing the word*. This is a means of the Lord's appointing, and which he ordinarily uses for this end, John xvii. 20. He prays for some that were to believe afterwards, but were to believe through the word in the ministry of his servants. And all that the Holy Ghost mentions afterwards as believers were brought to believe by the ministry of the word. The Jews, Acts iv. 4; the Gentiles, Acts, xiii. 48; the Ephesians, Eph. i. 13; the Corinthians, Acts xviii. 8. And therefore the ministers of the gospel are called 'ministers by whom they believed,' 1 Cor. iii. 5. And the word preached is called 'the word of faith,' Rom. x. 8. He shews the necessity of this means by a gradation, verse 14, 15. There must be a mission, that there may be preachers; there must be preaching, that there may be hearing; there must be hearing, that there may be believing; and so he concludes his discourse, verse 17.

Those that will have faith without hearing would have it out of God's way, and are such ever like to find it? If the word be not preached it cannot be heard. The Lord may work it in an extraordinary way, but can it be expected the Lord should step out of his ordinary path to meet those who shew so much contempt of God and of their souls as they will not wait on him for faith in the way that he has appointed? Will God work miracles to save those who so much despise him and his great salvation? Nay, the Lord will have the ministry of the word more honoured in this respect than miracles. He has used miracles sometimes for to startle and humble sinners in order to faith, but has referred those persons at the same time to the ministry of the word for the working of faith. We find not that ever the Lord so much honoured miracles as to work faith by them without the word, though we find the Lord ordinarily so far honouring the ministry of the word as to work faith by it without miracles. Miracles are ceased many hundred years ago, yet the Lord has been work-

ing faith in all ages by the ministry of the word. And when miracles were in use, they were but used as subservient to the word, to prepare for faith, which the Lord would work by hearing the word. Saul was struck down and humbled in a miraculous way, but he was sent to hear Ananias, that he might be possessed with the Spirit of faith; he was not filled with the Holy Ghost till then, it descended on him in his ministry, Acts ix. 6. The jailor was humbled by a miraculous earthquake, Acts xvi. 27, 28, but the Lord would not work faith in him by that miracle, he reserved the honour of that work to the ministry of Paul and Silas, ver. 80, 81, 82, 84.

Hearing the word is the ordinary means to attain faith, and was the ordinary means when the Lord appeared in extraordinary and miraculous dispensations. If you would have faith, then,

(1.) Be diligent in hearing. Neglect no opportunities, especially none that are offered on that day which the Lord has set apart for this purpose. When men neglect these opportunities, it signifies too plainly that they yet have no faith. If it had been wrought in them by the word, the word would be more esteemed by them; they would not proclaim their contempt of it so openly by such gross neglects. It is strange, if men can so much despise that which has even been an instrument to save their lives, to deliver their souls from death; and as these neglects signify they yet have no faith, so hereby they run the hazard never to have it; for the word is not effectual without the Spirit, and the Spirit breathes not always. The Spirit blows where and when it listeth. What know you but the Spirit may vouchsafe a gale when you are wilfully absent? And when you have provoked him by neglecting such an opportunity, such an advantage for your soul, what know you but that the Spirit of God may never vouchsafe any more? You that would have faith, neglect no opportunity; the neglect of one may be the loss of your souls.

(2.) If you would have faith by hearing, give way to no prejudice against the word, nor him that delivers it. If the devil cannot keep men from hearing, his next attempt is to fill them with prejudice, that so they may get no more benefit by hearing than if they heard not. The apostle speaks of some whose consciences are seared with a hot iron. This prejudice was one of those hot irons wherewith he seared the minds and hearts of the Jews: so that the word, in the ministry of Christ himself, made so little impression on them; you find them frequently in the gospel expressing their prejudices against him, and this was it which made the gospel, in the ministry of the apostles, ineffectual to the Gentiles. The apostle was a babbler to the Greeks, and his preaching foolishness. Give not way to such prejudice against the word, if you would have it prove a word of faith.

I know a natural man cannot of himself pluck up the roots of this prejudice, it grows deep in the corruption of his heart; but yet the branches, the acts of it, are for the most part so unreasonable, as reason itself would cast them out if it were but exercised. To give you an instance or two:

He is not of our way and judgment, he complies not with our ancient customs and practices. This is the common rise of many men's prejudice against their ministers; but now, was not this the very rise of that prejudice which the Jews had against Christ and the apostles? They were not of their way and judgment, they decried their old customs and usages; is it reasonable to give way to that which was their ruin, and to entertain it upon the same account?

Oh, but he shews no learning, has no eloquence in his style, no ornament in his discourse. This is a common prejudice too, but very rarely

objected by any, but such as cannot judge what is sound learning or true eloquence ; a clear, masculine style, a spiritual, judicious discourse, signifies nothing to these persons, who have more of self-conceit than judgment. Some ridiculous quibbles, or affected jingles, is that which they count eloquence ; some scraps of stories, and patches of Greek and Latin phrases, which school-boys may reach, and men of judgment count below them, is that which they call learning.

But if the objections were more judicious, yet would this prejudice be unreasonable ; for must the face of divine truth be patched and painted before it can please you ? must it be set off with the colours of fancy, and borrow some beauty-spots from human learning ? can you not like it but in a wanton dress, nor embrace it but in the habit of a harlot ? must the truth of God be adulterated to please you ? or were not Christ and the apostles wise enough to know what habit did best become it ? I question not but Paul, yea Christ himself, would have been counted a babbler by such profane and foolish wretches as these.

Oh, but he speaks out of spite, and his reproving my sins is edged with spleen. But is not this to take upon thee the prerogative of God ? Doest thou presume herein to know the heart of him that speaks ? This is not only to be unreasonable, but presumptuously wicked ; to make thyself like God in knowing the heart, but to act like the devil, in forming an accusation that is without all ground.

Other prejudices, as unreasonable as these, I might pursue. But judge of the rest by these ; and if ever you would have the word to beget faith, empty the heart of prejudice against it.

(8.) Take most heed to that word which most concerns you. Mind that most which is most suitable to the state of your souls. Now the truths that are most proper for a state of unbelief are such as these :—

*First*, Those which discover the sinfulness, the misery, and impotency of an unbeliever ; his sin which brings this misery upon him, and his impotency that keeps him under it. Attend diligently to that word which discovers the sinfulness of a natural man's heart and life, which shews that his heart is a puddle of corruption, a spring of sin, a seed-plot of wickedness, a sink of uncleanness, a habitation of devils and impure lusts, a raging sea casting up mire and filth, which, though it may seem calm and quiet sometimes, yet ruffled a little with the wind of temptation, is restless, raging, and tempestuous, overflows all banks and bounds, which shews the sinfulness of his life, that it is a continued act of rebellion against him ; that every thought, word, act, is an offence and dishonour to him ; that his whole way is an abomination to the Lord ; which shews the sinfulness of sin, which sets it out in its colours, which presents you with the aggravations of it, holds it out in its weight and pressure, which sets it forth in its dimensions, the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of his wickedness.

Attend to that word which discovers the misery of an unbeliever ; that he is under the curses and threatenings of the law, under the sentence of condemnation, pursued by the justice of God, exposed to the wrath of the Most High, and every moment in danger of hell. Mind that word which expresses the weight of those curses and threatenings, the danger of that sentence, the severity of that justice, the terror of that wrath, the dreadful-ness of those everlasting burnings.

Attend to that word which shews the impotency of an unbeliever ; of himself he can do nothing to shake off this sinfulness, to escape those curses, to repeal that sentence, to satisfy that justice, to appease that wrath,

or to avoid eternal torments ; that while he continues in this state, all this sinfulness increases, this misery grows bigger and swells higher.

*Secondly*, Those truths which tend to conviction ; mind those and apply them. When the word comes home to any of your consciences and tells you this is your case, if ever you desire faith, yield to such convictions, apply that word to yourselves, and say, I am the man that am thus sinful, whose heart and life has been such a provocation to God ; I am the man who am thus miserable, the threatenings are directed against me, the sentence is passed against me ; I am the man whom justice pursues, and on whom the wrath of God abides. When the word is applied in particular, and the soul convinced thus in particular of its own sinfulness and misery ; Satan is dislodged out of one of his strongholds, and the sinner is in a fair way towards faith. To be convinced of unbelief is a good step to faith. Satan knows this, and therefore he opposes conviction with all his might, and raises in the soul all the prejudice against it that he can possibly ; suggests to the sinner that this is the way to distract him and drive him to despair, whereas that malicious spirit knows it is the way of peace ; but this way of peace he would not have the sinner know, lest he should lose him, and therefore he puts the soul upon resistance, would have him rise up against the convincing power of the word, and stave it off with all his art and might. When the word comes near the conscience, and the minister is fastening conviction on it, he cries out in the soul against him, as he did against Christ in the possessed man, ‘ Art thou come to torment me before my time ? What have I to do with thee ? ’ Whereas this is not the way to be tormented, but to avoid everlasting torments ; this is not the way to wound you, but to make you sensible how you are wounded, that so ye may be more capable of cure, and may make haste to the physician who only can cure you.

And therefore, as you desire faith, as you love your souls, and would not gratify Satan in destroying them ; yield to the conviction, yield to the convincing power of the word ; resist not that Spirit whom Christ sends on purpose to convince you of sin, because you have not believed in him. When the Spirit has done this work effectually, when the soul is convinced of unbelief and of the miseries that attend it, when he applies these to himself, then he is under sail for faith and happiness.

*Thirdly*, Those truths that discover the rich grace and all-sufficient righteousness of the Lord Jesus. When the sinner is sensible of his wound, it will be seasonable to apply that word which leads him to the balm that is in Gilead, which discovers Christ lifted up for the healing of wounded sinners ; when he sees himself miserable by unbelief, the word that discovers Jesus the author and finisher of faith will be in season ; when the Spirit has convinced him of sin, the word should be applied to convince him of righteousness, that there is a righteousness sufficient to expiate his sin, sufficient to redeem him from misery.

He should mind that word that may moderate his fears, raise his hopes, quicken his desires, attract all his heart and affections to Christ.

Each part of the word, as it is in season, should be laid up in the mind and pondered there ; diversions from the world or carnal company should be avoided ; the loose vagaries which the mind is wont to take in hearing, and after, should be curbed ; the word must be kept close to the heart by fixed thoughts till it works its effect.

And the soul should be lifted up in prayer to God for the concurrence and the co-operation of his Spirit.