

warfare.—Eye thy reserves. The captain of thy salvation is both thy vanguard and thy rear-ward, and will be thy reward. Thou gainest thy husband, as David did his wife, by conquering these Philistines: and, while thou art fighting for him, he is weaving thy crown. (2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.) Eye thy fellow-soldiers, those worthies of the heavenly David, that are both militant and triumphant. (Heb. xii. 1.) Example is very forcible. Yea, take advantage by thy very foils, to be more humble, charitable, dependent, watchful, and courageous. Let not the enemy gain the field, after conquest, by a back-blow of pride. This Antiochus gains often more by flattery than by force. (Dan. xi. 21, 22.) It is honourable for Christ to say, “Well done,” &c., but dangerous for Satan to say, “Well done!” and safe for thee to say, “Poorly done,” when thou hast done thy best. Despise thyself when others admire thee; and be assured, that self-admiration is the most dangerous devil in the world. Especially improve advantages prudently: when thou hast thy enemy on the hip, yea, on the ground, fall with all thy weight upon him, give him no quarter, lest thou meet with the doom of Ahab, (1 Kings xx. 42,) and of the Israelites. (Num. xxxiii. 55, 56.) Here, as one notes well, learn wisdom of the serpent’s brood, who never thought they had Christ sure enough, though they had him in the grave. (Matt. xxvii. 64.) Remember: it is thy highest wisdom, first to discern, next to improve, the spiritual contrarieties that act in thy own bosom. He is the wisest man that knows himself, and he the strongest man that conquers himself. This alone is the true Israelite, who, by conquering himself, doth in a pious sense overcome both heaven, earth, and hell. (Gen. xxxii. 28.)

SERMON XIV.

BY THE REV. THOMAS WHITE, LL.B.

WHAT FAITH IS THAT WHICH EXCEPT WE HAVE IN PRAYER, WE MUST NOT THINK TO OBTAIN ANY THING OF GOD?

But let him ask in faith.—James i. 6.

FOR the connexion of these words with the former, since they will not give much light to the question I am to handle, and the time will hardly permit things more necessary to be spoken, I shall wholly wave or very briefly speak to.

The subject I am to speak to, is to show what is meant here by asking “in faith,” or what faith that is which whoso hath not, must not, or hath no reason to, expect to receive any thing from God. God may bestow his mercies where and on whom he pleaseth; but he is no way engaged by promise to bestow any mercy on such an one that asketh not in faith. It is not said, that such an one should not expect any great matters from God, but not any thing at all; the least mercy is greater than he hath any reason to think he shall receive; not only he shall not

receive wisdom, spoken of in verse 5, but not any thing. Wisdom he may get as Ahithophel did, and many other things, without praying in faith, or praying at all; but for Divine wisdom, or for any blessing from God, he may think what he will, but if the apostle may be thought worthy to advise him, he would not have him think to receive any thing, except he ask, and ask in faith. Therefore it much concerns us to know what is meant by *asking in faith*, since the want of it makes our prayers of none effect: if we pray without it, we may pray; but you cannot justly expect any return of your prayers, except it be as of an arrow shot up to heaven, upon your own head to your wounding. Of this question I shall speak very plainly, as the Lord shall enable me in the evidence and demonstration of the Spirit, comparing spiritual things with spiritual things.

I. Some may make it to imply more to ask *in faith* than to ask *with faith*, or that it is more to be *in faith*, than for *faith* to be *in us*. *To be in love* is more than *to love*; and when it is said, that the apostle was *in the Spirit*, (Rev. i. 10,) it shows that not only he *had* the Spirit, and was *filled* with it, but there were great overflowings, and a superabundance of the Spirit. This the apostle seems to call "the prayer of faith;" (James v. 15;) as if their faith rather prayed than they: as St. Paul speaks: "Not I, but the grace of God which was with me;" (1 Cor. xv. 10;) when faith rather may be said to act *us* than we to act *faith*.

But I suppose those high degrees of faith cannot be meant here, because it is said that they who have not this faith must not think to receive any thing, not the least: if so, then the highest degrees of faith should be required for the obtaining the lowest degrees of mercy. But scripture-promises are made to the truth, and not to the degrees, of grace: to faith that is but as a grain of mustard-seed, to remove mountains; and to love that is but a spark, to be victorious. (Matt. xii. 20.)

(I.) But I shall rather endeavour to show you how faith is taken here, than how it is taken in other places; therefore,

To "*ask in faith*," may be here spoken *in reference to the person that prays*; namely, he that prays must be in the faith, a faithful or righteous person. The scripture is full to this purpose; as: "If I regard iniquity in mine heart," though my tongue do not plead for it, nay, though it speaks against it, though I refrain from it in my life; (for we may love the sin we commit not;) and if I do so regard it in mine heart, God will not hear my prayers: if I give it so much as a good look, (for so the Hebrew, "if I see iniquity in my heart,") if I take pleasure in sin, for David calls it "painful iniquity," for so in the Hebrew. (Psalm lxxvi. 18.) No saint can live without committing sin; but all saints live without regarding it in their hearts. So also, "The prayer of a righteous man availeth much." (James v. 16.) How MUCH is not set down, because it cannot be set down how much it avails; as much as they please; they may have what they will. But, for a wicked man, though his prayers were effectual, they avail not much, since their desires are for temporals. The other places are full to this point, namely, that the prayers of none but righteous persons are accepted with God; as John ix. 31; James i. 15; Prov. xxviii. 9; 1 John iii. 15.

OBJECTION I. To this may be objected, that "many unregenerate and profligate wretches have obtained [some things] by prayer; as scoffing Ishmael; (Gen. xxi. 17;) nay, Ahab, a man that 'sold himself to work wickedness,' prevailed with God, for an adjournment of the judgment denounced."

I answer: 1. This was done by way of common providence, or God's prerogative, not by way of promise; so that they could not reasonably expect that their prayer should be heard.

2. God did this to honour the ordinance of prayer. As when our children come and tell us of some poor body: though we may not think it fit to relieve him in respect of his wants, yet we give him, for fear we should hinder our children from acts of charity; for they, not knowing our reasons of denying him relief, will expound it to be our neglect of the poor. So, many times, God may give to bad men, lest good men should be discouraged from prayer.

3. God gives to wicked men when they pray, oft-times for the strengthening of his people's faith: for they may be sure, if God hears the croakings of ravens, he will hear the mournings of doves.

OBJEC. II. You may farther say, "Are wicked men bound to pray, since their prayers are an abomination, and they cannot ask in faith?"

I answer: 1. Inability to pay a debt doth not acquit one from it, nor cancel the obligation. If one blows out the candle, one cannot excuse one's self for not working, by saying that they could not work in the dark; nor can a boy excuse himself from saying the lesson [which] he hath torn out of his book.

2. Because wicked men break others of God's commandments, it cannot justify them in the breaking of this: sin doth superinduce a new obligation, namely, to punishment, but doth not cancel their former, namely, to duty.

3. Wicked men sin not in praying, but in praying so.

4. Doubtless the wickedest man in the world is bound to desire grace.

OBJEC. III. "But doth not this make God a respecter of persons, since he will hear none but his own children, and them that love him? If a judge should favour his relations in judicature, he should be unjust."

I answer, No; God is no respecter of persons, by doing thus:—

1. Because the prayers of saints are better, as well as their persons nearer; for the prayers of the wicked are lazy, irreverent, brutish, wanton prayers. (Hosea vii. 14.) If God's people should pray so, God would not hear them either.

2. If unbelievers could pray better than saints, yet God might acquit the saint, and condemn the unbeliever; as a judge may pass sentence against one who hath paid ninety and nine pounds of an hundred, and acquit another who hath not paid a farthing, if his surety hath paid it.

3. Though in matter of justice we are not to respect persons, (Lev. xix. 15,) yet in matters of favour we may. (Gal. vi. 10.) This may be the first meaning of the words, but not the only, nor as I conceive the chief. Therefore,

(II.) To "*ask in faith,*" is, *to believe that all we say in prayer is true.*—When we confess ourselves to be grievous sinners, we are to think ourselves to be as great sinners as we say we are; when we call God Almighty "our Father," we are to believe him to be so.

Then the poor soul will say, "Alas! I cannot pray in faith; for I cannot say, 'Our Father,' since I do not believe that I am his child! How, then, can I call him *Father*?"

I answer: 1. Thou mayest call him *Father*; for he is thy Father. If thou shouldest see divers children playing some untowardness in the street, and shouldest see a man that passed by go and single out one of them, and correct him, and yet the child should follow him, would you not say he was the father of that child? For a strange child would fly from him, or fly at him, if he should strike him. Dost thou not follow God when he corrects thee? Be of good comfort; God is thy Father, and thou art his child.

When that precious man Mr. Murcot was in great anguish, fearing that God was not his Father, these words were impressed on his mind: "If I am not thy Father, why dost thou follow after me?"

2. Nay, not only God is thy Father, but thou *thinkest* so also. When Naaman's servants called him *father*, what did they mean, but to show that they acknowledged that he carried himself rather as a father than a master? When the prodigal returned, though he acknowledged that he was not worthy to be called his son, yet he called him *father*, since he had failed of nothing that might be expected from a loving, tender father. Mayest not thou call God thy *Father* upon this account? Hath he not dealt with thee in abundance of tender compassion; nay, more than the tenderest parent in the world? Give God the glory due to his goodness, call him "Father;" for thou mayest truly say he hath dealt so with thee. The same Mr. Murcot, being troubled upon the same account, namely, the fear that God was not his Father, had these words come into his mind with power; namely, "If I am not thy Father, am I thy enemy?" God argues thus with the Jews. (Deut. xxxii. 6.)

(III.) *We are to believe, that whatsoever we ask of God in prayer is according to his will.* (1 John v. 14.)

The poor doubting soul will say, "Then I dare not pray for the recovery of my child, since I know not whether it be the will of God it shall recover or no."

I answer: Thine asking what God hath decreed not to give, makes not thy prayer sinful; but thine asking what he hath forbid thee to desire. For the will of God's decree is not the rule for us to walk by, but the will of his command. (Deut. xxix. 29.) If what we pray for be such as is lawful and good for us to desire, though God should tell us by a prophet that he would not grant it, yet we might lawfully pray for it, and be blameless; for so did David. (2 Sam. xii.) Nay, though God should send us word by a prophet that we should die and not live, yet we might pray, and not only be blameless, but successful; for so was Hezekiah. Nay, though God should forbid us to pray, yet since he commands us to pray in his word, we may pray and be heard; for though God bid Jacob let him go, yet he wrestled on, and obtained the blessing; and

Moses, though God bid him let him alone, yet Moses did not let him alone, and prevailed. So, then, to ask things according to the will of God, is to ask nothing that is unlawful to ask; as for one to pray that God would prosper us in evil ways,—this is to ask what is not according to his will. I say, you are to pray for nothing that is any way unlawful to be desired. Now, it is not enough that the thing itself be lawful to be desired, but the end for which we desire it must be lawful; for if we desire lawful things for unlawful ends, we ask amiss. (James iv. 3.) The end why we desire such a mercy must be such as God approves of by his word, as well as the thing itself. To desire gifts of edification for ostentation, though according to the will of God as to *the thing desired*, yet as to *the end* it is abominable.

II. As concerning the matter of our prayers we are to believe as hath been said, so as to God we are to believe several things. Indeed, scarce any of his attributes but some way or other we are to act our faith upon in prayer: but I shall choose some few on which the eye of faith is especially fixed in prayer.

1. The first is *God's omniscience*; for else we shall be at a great loss. If we believe not this, how can we be assured that God hears our prayers? For,

(1.) *In respect of the number of prayers.*—There being millions of prayers put up at the same time to God, if he be not omniscient, how is it possible he should hear all? If any should not be heard, how knowest thou that thine is not the prayer that is not heard?

(2.) *In respect of the secrecy of prayer.*—For except God know our hearts, he cannot know our prayers: for “it is the heart that prays; the tongue only speaks:” *Orat mens, lingua loquitur.*

(3.) *If God knew not the heart, the poor soul who prayed with sighs and groans that cannot be expressed, should find no acceptance;* when the hypocrite, that speaks much and means nothing, shall be heard for his much babbling.

(4.) *The saints ask such things that require infinite knowledge and wisdom to do for us.*—For when we desire God to make us know him, it requires more wisdom than for us to teach an infant the mathematics. So we desire God to cure us of our spiritual distempers. Alas! they are so various, so contrary, so deeply-rooted in our natures, we are such froward unruly patients, that it requires infinite wisdom to heal us; for when God goes to cure our pride by afflicting us, then our impatience is increased. That which is the cure of one corruption increaseth another.

If we believe not God's wisdom and omniscience, we cannot acquiesce in God's answer of prayers; for we may *suffer*, but not *acquiesce in*, God's answer of prayers.

2. *We are to believe God's providence, that he rules and orders all things.*—Whoso thinks that all things are ruled by second causes, by the power and policy of men, or by the stars, or chance, they will not pray at all, or go to God merely as a refuge: we shall pray to God, but trust to ourselves; or to medicines when we are sick, and to our food when we are well. We may be confident we shall be delivered; but we shall not at all trust that God will deliver us. To strengthen our faith in

this, we must know, that those things that seem to be least within the compass of Providence, are wholly guided by it.

(1.) *Things natural*.—God makes the sun to arise, and the rain to fall; (Matt. v. 45;) gives “to every seed his own body.” (1 Cor. xv. 38.)

(2.) *The smallest things*.—They escape not Providence; God numbers the hairs of our head. (Matt. x. 30.)

(3.) *Things casual*.—That which we call “chance-medley” is providential as to God: (Prov. xvi. 33:) the man “drew a bow at a venture,” and yet God directed it to an hair’s breadth. (1 Kings xxii. 34.)

(4.) *The counsels of men*, yea, against God, yet are ordered by the determinate counsel of God. (Acts ii. 23.)

(5.) *Things most unruly*.—The raging sea goes so far, and no further, by God’s decree. The “roaring lion” cannot destroy a swine, nor afflict nor tempt a saint, without God’s leave. (Job i. 12; Luke xxii. 31, 32.) The wrath of man, as well as the rage of the devil, is ordered and restrained by the wisdom and power of God. (Psalm lxvi. 3.)

(6.) *The skill and inventions of men*. (Isai. xxviii. 27—29.)

(7.) *Sin itself*, whether of omission or commission, (as silence and discord in music,) serves to make the harmony sweeter.

3. *God’s omnipotence is to be believed*.—Else we will stagger through unbelief. This was that in which the eminency of Abraham’s faith did appear; (Rom. iv. 21;) and of the centurion’s; (Matt. viii. 8—10;) and Christ far more blames them that question his *can* than his *will*: for He doth not so much as reprove the leper in Matt. viii. 1—4: but so sharply reproves *him** that he makes him weep, because he said, “If thou canst;” and he saith, “If thou canst believe,” to show that we cannot believe, if we do not believe God’s power. (Mark. ix. 22—24.) We, doubtless, are generally faulty this way, though we are ashamed to own it; as you may see by this instance: If we have two children sick; the one whose death would be far more afflictive to us hath some cold or some other small distemper; the other [is sick] of some mortal disease, and given up by physicians. Thou prayest for the recovery of both; but for which of those two recovery † art thou least confident? Is it not of his who is most sick? And why so, but because thou questionest God’s power or providence? If thou shalt say, “My sins are so great, God will not hear my prayers and heal my child;” for if, indeed, that were the reason of thy fearing that God will not hear thee, thou wouldest rather fear it as to thine other child, since his death would be more afflictive.

Now, the saints have more reason to strengthen their faith in the omnipotence of God in prayer, than wicked men: because the things worldly men desire need not Omnipotence to do. A creature may do what they desire, except God will withdraw his common providence. For one that is worth an hundred thousand pounds can make a poor man rich; and some medicines, in an ordinary way of providence, have virtue to cure many diseases. But the things [which] the people of God desire cannot be done but by Omnipotence. (Eph. i. 19.)

* The father of the demoniac.—EDIT. † The construction ought to stand thus: “But for the recovery of which of those two art thou least confident?”—EDIT.

4. *We must act our faith upon his goodness and bounty.*—For we must not only have high thoughts of God's other excellences, but of his goodness also, of his abundant willingness to do us good, and loathness to afflict us; for surely he never afflicts us but in case of necessity. "If need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations." (1 Peter i. 6.) When he afflicts us, he only gives us *necessaries*; but when he bestows mercies, he gives us not only for our necessity, but "richly to enjoy." When we go to a covetous man for money, he parts with every penny as with a drop of blood. For us to think God parts so with his mercies, that he is hard to be entreated, and that he is an hard master either for work or wages, are thoughts utterly unworthy, and shamefully dishonourable to the goodness of God. If thy child, whose finger if it should but ache, thine heart aches, should think thou grudgest him every bit of meat [which] he eats, thou wouldest think him a wretched child, unworthy of thy tender affections: and must it not be far worse in thee to have such thoughts of God, since *tam pius nemo, tam pater nemo*?* Was it so great a grief to Peter to have Christ question his love, (John xxi. 17,) though he had given but sad testimony of his love but lately? and can it choose but much offend God, for thee to question God's love to thee, nay, his goodness in itself, when God hath given thee no cause of either? (Mal. i. 2.) We should go to God with as much confidence of his love, and readiness to do us good, as the child doth to the tenderest parent, as we do to the dearest friend we have in the whole world, and much more abundantly. If we do not believe that *the goodness* of God is as much above the goodness and love of our dearest friend, as we account his *wisdom and power* above our friend's, we have unworthy thoughts of that attribute which God hath most abundantly manifested, and would have [to be] most glorified; and the love our friend bears us is but a drop from and of that ocean that is in God. Doubtless, God loves his enemies more than we love our friends; he loves us more, if we love him, than we love ourselves or him. Surely, God loves the weakest saint on earth more than the highest angel in heaven loves him; for when God saith, that he "so loved the world," it was such a *sic* ["so"] there was no *sicut* ["as"] for it; it might not be said, "as the angels loved God." Ah! we deal unworthily with God in having base, low thoughts of his goodness: He hath little deserved it at our hands,—he that hath done such wonders and miracles of mercies for us, and hath promised to do more. Say, that every mercy is too great for thee to receive; but say not, that any is too great for God to give. Surely, surely God is more willing to give, than we are to receive, mercies.

But you will say, "If God be so willing to bestow mercies, why doth he not bestow them without prayers, and such importunity?"

I answer: God doth not thus because he is not willing, but because we are not fit for mercies; for God "waits to be gracious." The tender mother had rather give her child cordials than bitter pills; but her child is sick. By our prayers we make not God more willing, but we become more prepared for mercies; for our prayers exercise, and so

* "No one is so compassionate as God; no one possesses such paternal affections."—EDIT.

strengthen, grace; and strong grace weakens and mortifies corruption; and then we are fit for mercies. God only stays while he may bless us indeed, as Jabez phraseth it. One that is in a boat, and pulls a rope whose other end is tied to a rock, pulls not the rock to the boat, but the boat to the rock; so our importunities move not God, but us.

But you will say, "When we pray for others, this reason holds not; for their graces are not increased by our praying for their deliverances from misery or danger, or the church from persecution."

I answer: It is true; but our prayers add to our reward; for God is in goodness as Satan is in badness, and much more abundantly; whereas when Satan hath a commission, and intends to do some mischief, he, as oft as he can, engageth witches to put him upon doing that which he intends to do, howsoever that he may involve them in the guilt; as if they themselves [had done it], or that he had not done it if they had not put him upon it. So God, that the saints may have the reward of the good he doeth to others, (as if they themselves had done it, or as if God would not have done it without their prayers,) puts them upon praying for those mercies for others, which he will do howsoever. (Isai. lix. 16.)

III. The third object of faith are *the promises*; and there are three kinds, some *to* prayer, some *of* prayer, some to the *person* praying. We are to act our faith upon all; but, for brevity-sake, (for I am forced to contract,) I shall answer but one objection.

The poor soul will say, "I do not believe I have any interest in the promises; therefore I cannot pray in faith."

I answer: To obtain the mercies included in a promise, it is not required that we should believe our interest in it, but the truth; not that God will perform to us, but to those to whom it belongs, though you do not believe it belongs to you, for the promises made to graces are made to them that have them, not to them that believe. As, for example, the promises made to faith are made to them that have faith, though they believe not that they do believe; and that poor souls doubt that God will never make good any promise to them, proceeds not from any doubt of God's veracity or faithfulness, but of their own unworthiness and non-interest in them.

IV. The fourth and main object of faith which our faith must eye in our prayers, is CHRIST, in whom "all the promises are Yea and Amen;" who hath reconciled the person and attributes of God: and concerning Christ we are to believe,

1. *The great love God bears to Christ.*—Which is doubtless greater than to the whole creation. "For to which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my beloved, in whom I am well pleased?" God's love to Christ is not only greater, but diffusive; for the love that God bears to Christ is as the oil that was poured upon the head of Aaron, which ran down to the skirts of his garments; so the love that God bears to Christ terminates not in the person of Christ, but is communicated to all that are his. As Haman, to show the great hatred he bore to Mordecai, would not bound his malice on the person of Mordecai, but would destroy the whole nation; so God thought it too small a testimony of

his love to Christ to be well-pleased with Christ, (for so he is with the angels,) but he is well-pleased in Christ with the whole world; I mean, all nations. We must believe this, or we cannot expect any favour for his sake. His love to Christ is so great, that his love to Christ is greater than his hatred to sinners; so that any sinner may be reconciled and accepted through Christ. Christ came to reconcile God and sinners, not God and sin: as one who desires the king to be reconciled to such a traitor doth not desire him to be reconciled to the treason, but to the traitor.

2. *We are to believe the fulness of Christ's satisfaction, and the greatness of the value and efficacy of the death of Christ.*—For if justice be not satisfied, we have no throne of grace, but a seat and bar of justice, to come before. The blood of Christ hath a pacifying, purifying, purchasing, perfuming, reconciling, satisfying, justifying, virtue. It pacifies God's wrath, it reconciles and justifies our persons, it purifies our nature, it perfumes our duties, it purchaseth our inheritance.

3. *We are to believe the efficacy and infallible success of Christ's intercession.*—The fulness of Christ's intercession is in this, that he doth three things for us, all that we stand in need of, according to what was typified by the high-priest; for he did three things:—

(1.) *He sprinkled the blood upon the mercy-seat.*—Hereby an atonement was made as to our sins, they being pardoned.

(2.) *He went in with incense.*—Hereby our duties were perfumed; so God is said to "inhabit the praises of his people," and to "dwell in thick darkness," that is, in the thick smoke of the incense.

(3.) *He had the names of the tribes engraven on his breast or heart.*—Christ pleads the love [which] he bears to his people. Three places the names of the saints are written in, out of either whereof nor men nor devils can blot them out, namely, in the book of life, on the palms of his hands, and on the heart of Christ. I may add the fourth thing the high-priest did when he entered into the holy place, namely, he went in with all his rich priestly garments, to show we should be clothed with the rich robes of Christ's righteousness; for what the high-priest did, he did not in his personal, but in his public, capacity. Now, the efficacy of his intercession was not only from the wonderful love [which] God bore to Christ, from the unparalleled interest [which] Christ had in the Father; by these means we may expect all acts of favour, but we have justice on our side; for favour is an arbitrary thing; therefore Christ is our Advocate; (1 John ii. 1, 2;) he presents our case not by way of petition, but by way of pleading; for advocates do not petition, but plead.

So then Christ doth four things as to our prayers. (1.) He indites them by his Spirit; (2.) He perfumes them by his merit; then, (3.) He presents our prayers and persons; for we have access through him; (Eph. iii. 12;) and then, (4.) Superadds his own intercession, his blood crying louder than our sins, and better things than our prayers.

4. *We are to believe and improve this truth;* namely, *That the Father exceedingly delights to honour Christ.*—And hereby God wonderfully honours Christ, by pardoning and receiving into favour such rebel-

lions sinners as we are, for his sake, by forgiving any thing for his sake. A sinner cannot please God better than by coming with confidence for pardon for his sake. If we come for pardon or mercies, and our confidence ariseth from our low thoughts of the number or sinfulness of our sins, or of God's hatred of sin, or our ability to satisfy justice or deserve mercy, our confidence is desperate impudence and arrogance: but if purely from the high esteem [which] we have of the incomprehensibility of Christ's satisfaction, and of Christ's interest in God's love, and of the Father's delight to honour Christ, such confidence is precious and acceptable with God; and whosoever hath it may go with as much freedom and assurance of favour as if he had never sinned; with as much as Adam in his innocency, or the angels in glory. Alas! we do not believe or not improve these truths; for if we did, we might have any thing; for Christ hath interest enough in God to bear us out, and procure any mercy.

5. *We are to believe, improve, and obey Christ's command.*—Namely, in John xiv. 13, 14; xvi. 23. The former truths give us great hope, but *this* strong consolation; for though such a great person had never so much interest in some other great person, with whom we had to do, yet without a commission from him we might not go in his name; but Christ hath not only given us leave, but a command; and now it is not an arbitrary thing, we *may* do or not do, but we *must* do. This is the incomprehensible goodness of God, that what is for our good he commands us, that not only we may be put-on the more to obtain what is good for us, but that it may be an act of obedience, and so we may be rewarded for procuring our own happiness.

So much for the things we are to believe; now for the manner of believing.

1. *We are to believe these things of God and Christ with an historical faith.*

2. *With a faith of recumbency.*—We are to rely upon the power, wisdom, and goodness of God, and upon Christ's interest in God, &c.

3. *Saints are, by way of duty, but not by way of a necessary condition of obtaining whatsoever they ask, to believe with the faith of assurance of obtaining whatsoever we pray for.*—By faith here in the text is not meant, that we must, without any doubt or wavering, believe that we shall receive in kind whatsoever we ask, even the very thing we pray for.

(1.) The leper was cured, though he prayed with an "if thou wilt."

(2.) Those in desertion should put up no acceptable prayers, since they have not faith of assurance of obtaining.

(3.) Christ, when he comes at the day of judgment,—he shall not find this faith on the earth; (Luke xviii. 8;) and yet it is said, in verse 7, God will hear those prayers.

(4.) The apostle forbids this faith; (James i. 7;) therefore it is not the faith here commanded; for then it should run thus: "You must believe you shall receive the thing you ask for; but if you do not, you must not." Many more arguments may be brought to prove this; but these shall suffice, beside what shall be said in the positive handling this

question, namely, *What faith is required as to our believing absolutely and undoubtedly in kind the very thing we ask ?* which I shall answer in several

PROPOSITIONS.

PROP. I. *When we ask temporal blessings as we ought, we are bound to believe we shall receive them as we ask them.*—For our prayers for temporal things should be spiritual as to the end, and moderate as to their measure, and conditional as to their effect upon us ; that is, if it be for our good. Now, since our desires are to be conditional, and God's promises of temporals are conditional, we must not absolutely believe we shall receive what we ask : a conditional promise cannot be a foundation for an absolute faith.

PROP. II. *Our faith and confidence of obtaining the thing we ask should proceed pari passu, should be as strong to the event as it is to the conditions.*—If we are very confident [that] what we ask is for the glory of God or [for] our good, we must be as confident that we shall have it ; for as we are to put no condition to absolute promises, since God hath put none ; so we are to add no more conditions to conditional promises than God hath put ; and upon those conditions we are as fully to rely upon God's performance, as upon his performance of absolute promises.

PROP. III. *Though we cannot nor ought not certainly to believe the obtaining the thing we ask, if it be temporal, by virtue of the promise ; yet, by virtue of an immediate assurance God may give us of receiving the very thing we ask, we may, and indeed cannot choose but, expect it.*—We read of God's dealing so with several of his saints ; with Mr. Fox, and many others.

PROP. IV. *As for spiritual blessings, they are of four sorts.*

1. *Of edification ;* as gifts ; such as speaking with tongues, and prophesying in the primitive church, and the gifts of preaching and praying now. Or,

2. *Of consolation ;* as assurance, and the comforts of the Spirit, the privileges of the kingdom of God, as peace and joy in believing.

3. *Of sanctification ;* as grace and glory. For the former, the same rules as belong to temporals belong to these ; but for saving grace, as our prayers ought not to be conditional, since we are sure it is for our good and the glory of God for us to be holy ; so our faith ought not to be conditional, but absolute and particular, that God will give us grace and glory, if we sincerely and fervently ask it.

4. Yet though I should believe that God certainly will give grace, nay, and all other things, if good for me ; yet my not believing that God will give me grace, doth not null mine interest in the promise, but only my comfort ; nor shall it hinder God's performance, though it hinders our expectation of receiving.

PROP. V. *Though we are not absolutely to believe we shall receive temporal blessings, or those of consolation or edification ; yet that we do not more confidently expect the performance of such prayers in kind, proceeds generally from our not believing and improving the power and goodness of God, and the great interest Christ hath in God, and the rest that I*

have spoken of.—For, generally, we are more confident that the thing we pray for is good for us, than we are that we shall have it.

PROP. VI. *We may be confident that the restoring of ourselves or our relations to health, or deliverance of them out of danger, is for our good; as they, in our Saviour's time, who prayed to him for these mercies, were.*

PROP. VII. *As the case stands between justifying faith and assurance, so the case stands as to our receiving, and our expecting, the answer of our prayers in kind.*

1. As we may and shall have all the promises that are made to faith made good to us, though we do not believe that we have faith, and by consequence do not believe we shall have them made good to us; so when we pray for those things [which] God hath promised to those who love or fear God, or walk uprightly, (though we do not believe we have that fear or love, or that we walk uprightly,) if we have those graces, we shall receive the promises made to them.

2. As there are two kinds of assurance, one which comes from the testimony of our own spirits, when, upon serious examination of ourselves, we find that we do believe; the other, which comes from the testimony of the Spirit of God, witnessing with our spirits: so there are two kinds of assurance of receiving the thing we ask; one which proceeds from our believing, and improving our believing, the power and goodness of God, and Christ's interest in God, and God's delighting to honour Christ, by giving the mercies we ask in his name; the other, from God's immediate assuring us that we shall receive the very mercy we pray for.

3. As the immediate testimony of the Spirit comes with more evidence than the testimony of our own spirits; so the immediate assurance that God gives that we shall receive the things we pray for, is clearer and fuller than that which we have by our relying upon the power and goodness of God; or, to speak more properly, we do more fully rely upon the goodness and power of God, when God doth immediately enable us so to do, than when we work out this confidence by our own endeavours, assisted by the ordinary concurrence of the Spirit.

4. As it is not our sin to want the immediate testimony of the Spirit, so it is not our sin not to have this particular assurance of receiving what we ask. These parallels may be far more enlarged, and will hold, as I think, in all particulars.

USES.

The use of this is,—

1. For *consolation*, to all that love and fear God; for thy not believing [that] God will grant thy prayers, shall not hinder thy prayers from being accepted and granted. For although if thine unbelief were built upon thy not believing God's power or goodness to do what thou prayest for, [it] would hinder thee; yet, since thy diffidence proceeds from thy not believing that thou art such an one as the promises are made to, such thine unbelief shall not make the promise of God of no effect. (2 Tim. ii. 13.) In verses 11, 12, the apostle saith, "If we are dead with Christ," (not, "If we believe [that] we are dead with Christ,") "we shall also

live with him ;” though we do not *believe* [that] we are dead, if we are dead it shall not hinder : “ for if we believe not, God is faithful.” (2 Tim. ii. 13.) For suppose one dies, and leaves such an one a legacy ; though he to whom the legacy is left doth not know of any such legacy, yet the executor will not therefore not give him the legacy ; nay, though he will hardly believe it when he tells him, yet he will keep it and give it him : so the legacies that Christ hath left to the saints, though they little think any such legacies are left by Christ to them, yet their ignorance shall not frustrate Christ’s love ; nay, though they will not for the present extend their hand of faith to receive it, yet God will and doth keep mercy for thousands, until they will receive it. (Exod. xxxiv. 7.)

2. The second use is an use of *exhortation*.

(1.) *Put in thy claim for mercy* ; for thy claim will hold, not according to thy sense, knowledge, or belief, that thou hast an interest, but according to the truth of thine interest. Suppose thou shouldst promise to give to every one of thy children such a gift, if they were good children. Suppose one of your children who had obeyed your commands, and had been very inquisitive to know your will ; I say, suppose such a child should sit weeping because he thought he had not obeyed your commands, and because he thought you were angry with him, and upon that account would not come for your promised gift ; would you not therefore give it him ? Nay, would you not only be pleased with his obedience, but that he took so to heart your supposed anger ? So, O poor soul, that sittest weeping with thine eyes full of tears, and thine heart full of sorrow, under the sense of God’s supposed displeasure ! shall not God “ wipe all tears from thine eyes,” and give thee the promises he hath made to thee, though thou, through the sense of thy unworthiness, dost not believe thou hast any interest in them ?

(2.) The second advice is, *that thou shouldst endeavour to obtain the graces to which the promises are made* ; namely, fear and love of God, and uprightness of heart, &c. Whilst others are examining, and going from minister to minister, to know whether they have those graces, be thou getting of them. For, (i.) Thou shalt be sure to get an interest in the promises, for they are made to such as have the graces, not to those that know that they have those graces ; and if thou hast a title, thou shalt have possession. (ii.) By getting greater degrees of graces, the trouble of examination will be needless ; it will save thee that labour ; whereas, otherwise, thou wilt perpetually be put to examination : as for instance : Thou findest a spark of fire, and coverest it up again, and lettest it lie wet ; to-morrow thou wilt be as far to seek, and wilt as hardly find, the spark, and know whether there be any fire to-morrow as to-day. Another, knowing where to have fire close by, knows she can as soon fetch it from her neighbour as find it on her own hearth, if there be but a spark or two : she therefore fetches some, and blows up into a flame, and she lays on fuel to keep in the fire : so thou knowest where thou mayest have God’s love, namely, from God, “ who is near unto them that call upon him.” They know they may have it sooner by prayer, than find it by examination ; this they blow into a flame : and as when the fire flames we may be sure there is fire, without poring to find it ; so

when thy graces are in an eminent degree, they are so apparent, that one that hath but half an eye may see them. (iii.) By getting the conditions to which the promise is made, thou shalt often get what is better than the promise itself; for the promise is often temporal, when the condition is spiritual.

(3.) *Study much, or rather meditate much upon, these great gospel mysteries of Christ's satisfaction, of Christ's interest in the Father's love, and of the Father's delight to honour the Son, by giving mercies, and pardoning sinners, for his sake.*—Know that thou greatly dishonourest Christ when thou goest timorously to God for any mercy in his name, and it greatly argues thine infidelity. Suppose thy friend, that was bound with thee for some great sum of money, and he, hearing there were serjeants to arrest thee, should put himself into their hands to save thee from prison, and he should be carried to prison, and pay the debt, and send thee word that he had paid the debt every farthing; if thou shouldst, notwithstanding, be afraid to see thy creditor, or stir abroad, would it not argue that thou believedst not thy friend had paid the debt?

(4.) *Go, then, with confidence to God, in the name of Christ, since Christ hath bid thee, or else thou hast strange thoughts of Christ.*

Suppose a friend of yours should bid you go to such a great man for such a courtesy, and should tell thee that he had spoken to him in thy behalf, and bid thee not fear, for he could have any thing of him that he spoke to him for, and should bid thee go to him in his name, and tell him he sent thee; if thou shouldst stand considering what to do, and shouldst fear, that, for all thy friend professed he had so great an interest in that great man, you should not find it so when you came to him, would not this show that you feared your friend boasted of more interest than he had?

Christ hath plainly bid us go to the Father in his name from him, and that we shall have any thing whatsoever: if we doubt whether, when we go to the Father in his name, we shall obtain, doth it not plainly argue our low thoughts of Christ's interest in the Father's love, and that Christ hath higher thoughts of his interest in his Father's love than indeed he hath? The sense of thine own unworthiness should by no means hinder thee, except thou wentest to God in thine own name; for the question in this case is, not how God loves thee, but how God loves Christ. Thou hast thoughts high enough of God's love to Christ, if thou knowest that God loves Christ more than he hates any sinner in the world. Thy thoughts are not high enough of Christ's love to thee, if thou thinkest Christ will deny thee any thing; nor hast thou worthy thoughts of God's love to Christ, if thou thinkest God will deny Christ any thing, or any one that comes to him in his name, whom he bids so to do; for in so doing, he doth not so properly deny thee, as Christ.