

*take diligent heed that the world do not insinuate and wind itself into their hearts.*—O, I beseech you, keep your hearts far from the walls of this pest-house, this love-polluting world. Keep your love in heaven while your persons are engaged in the world. Let not your hearts smell of the smoke of this lower house, but of heaven. Beware that your love do not make its nest in this world, but let it take wing, and rest nowhere short of heaven, where its treasure is. Follow not the guises of this soul-polluting world. Let this idol-world be nothing to you; but God be all in all. Take heed that the multiplicity of worldly affairs choke not the sense of God. Remember, your best riches consist in the poverty of your desires. Make use of prosperity to prepare you for afflictions. Know, the dearest things must be parted with when God calls for them; and therefore keep your hearts loose from them. Bring your natural desires into a narrow compass; but let your hearts be enlarged towards God. Amuse not your hearts, as children, at the glistening outside of things; but fear a snare in every comfort. Feed much on spiritual delights, and that will kill carnal pleasures.

Let your hearts be as the mother-pearl; which, they say, receives no water but what comes from heaven: let your hearts be open towards heaven, but shut against the world; let not this great idol enter into God's temple.

(4.) Lastly: let us all be exhorted, *to be in nothing more curious than about the right placing of our love; that it be fixed on its right object, and in a right manner.*—Let us get a stamp of grace on all our love, and then it will become divine. Let us love nothing greatly, but what we shall love for ever. It was the saying of a serious Jansenist: "I would never begin to love that which, one day, I must cease to love." Let us labour after the highest strain of love to God, which is, *to love God for himself, and to love ourselves in God.* Our best being lies in God; and therefore our best love is to love ourselves in God. As one extreme heat burns-out another; so let our love to God burn-out our love to the world.

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## SERMON IV.

BY THE REV. WILLIAM JENKIN, A.M.

NOW IS THE TIME: OR, INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE PRESENT  
IMPROVING THE SEASON OF GRACE.

*We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*—2 Corinthians vi. 1, 2.

### SECTION I.

PAUL's epistles excel both in matter and in method. Their matter is principally reconciliation through Christ. What subject so sweet, so profitable? Their method is by way of doctrine and use: a method,

which if it be despised, Paul's writings cannot be duly valued. In the foregoing verse, the last words of it, he positively asserted the great doctrine of reconciliation through Christ, and doctrinally propounded it in these words: "He hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." This was his doctrine. In these two verses immediately following he applieth the doctrine: "We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted," &c. In which two verses, there are contained these three parts:—

I. The first is AN EXHORTATION, that they would not "receive the grace of God in vain," or a caution against their "receiving it in vain."

II. Secondly, THE REASONS that the apostle produceth to back the exhortation. Those reasons are two:—

*The first* is the reason of *his propounding this exhortation*; that is, because "he was a worker together with God."

*The second* is the reason of *their embracing this exhortation*; and that is in verse 2: "For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee," as it is in Isaiah xlix. 8.

III. Thirdly, you have here THE ACCOMMODATION, OF THE APPLICATION of this second reason unto the present state of the Corinthians: "Behold, *now*," saith the apostle, "is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation," that God of old promised unto Christ. Ye enjoy it, ye live under it; and therefore you must now improve it to the best advantage of your souls. Now we shall go over these three parts in the way of explication, that so we may the more profitably handle that part which I principally design to insist upon.

I. We shall explain THE EXHORTATION, or the caution that he layeth down, which is, *Not to receive the grace of God in vain*. Here we shall explain two things:—

1. We shall show you, *what is meant by the grace of God*.
2. *What is meant by receiving, or not receiving, the grace of God in vain*.

#### SECTION II.

1. First. *What is meant by the grace of God*.

You are here to understand by "grace" the doctrine of the gospel, frequently and fitly in the scripture called "grace;" as in Eph. iii. 2; Col. i. 6; Acts xx. 32; Titus ii. 11; and in sundry other scriptures the doctrine of the gospel is called "grace." And it is called by that name, for these three reasons:—

(1.) *Because it is graciously, and out of the free favour of God, bestowed*.—Why it is bestowed at all, it is from "grace:" why it is bestowed upon one age or place rather than other, it is only from God's free grace and favour. (Rom. xvi. 25, 26.) It is there said to be a "mystery kept secret since the world began, but now made manifest." And that in Isai. lxxv. 1: "I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name." To these God was pleased by the gospel to say, "Behold me." He was "found of those that sought him

not." God's argument to bestow the gospel of life upon a person, or a family, or a place, is merely from his own free good-will.

(2.) *The gospel is called "grace," because the subject-matter of the gospel is grace.*—Whatever it is [which] the gospel promiseth, whatever privilege or saving benefit is contained in the gospel, is all from grace: we are "justified freely by his grace." (Rom. iii. 24.) *Forgiveness of sin.*—It is said to be from "his rich grace." (Eph. i. 7.) *Eternal life.*—It is the free gift of God. *Effectual vocation.*—Saving conversion is merely from grace. We are "called according to his own purpose and grace; not according to our works." (2 Tim. i. 9.) "Unto you it is given to believe." (Phil. i. 29.) God giveth repentance. (2 Tim. ii. 25.) He "called me by his grace." (Gal. i. 15.) The saints are "heirs of grace." (1 Peter iii. 7.) Christ himself, that obtained all the privileges of the gospel for us, was sent as a token of free grace, free favour: "through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us." (Luke i. 78.) "So God loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." (John iii. 16.) Christ's whole work was to love, and his whole love was free. We purchase nothing without leaving of our money behind us. All his saved ones have nothing of their own but impotency and antipathy, nothing of their own to move God to save them. The law discovers God's will, and the gospel discovers his good-will.

(3.) *The gospel is called "grace," because it is the instrument, under the Spirit of God, of bestowing the benefits of free grace upon us.*—It is an invitation to the benefits of free grace: and it is our warrant of receiving those benefits, and of applying them. The gospel is not only a *story* to tell us what is done and what is obtained for believers; but it is a *testament*, to cause and to show unto us our interest in them by faith. We shall lay hold upon it, when He who ordained the gospel doth accompany it. The gospel brings salvation; (Titus ii. 11;) therefore the gospel is called "the ministration of righteousness," and "the ministration of the Spirit;" (2 Cor. iii. 8, 9;) the instrument made use of by the Spirit of God for enabling us to apply the righteousness of Christ, and all the benefits of free grace contained in it. And so I have opened the first thing in the exhortation, and shown what we are to understand by "the grace of God," even the doctrine of the gospel.

## SECTION III.

2. The second particular in the exhortation to be opened is, *the receiving thereof in vain.*

How is the doctrine of the gospel said to be received in vain? In the Greek it is *εις κενον*. The word signifies to receive it "emptyly, unfruitfully, unprofitably;" and, indeed, so it is too often received. It is true, the Gospel is to be received, and it cannot save us unless it be received; and therefore you read several times in the scripture of "receiving" it: the receiving of the "seed into good ground." (Matt. xiii. 23.) "They received the word" of God "gladly." (Acts ii. 41.) And, in Acts xi. 1: "The Gentiles received the word." And in Acts xvii. 11: "They received the word with all readiness of mind," with all cheerfulness. So, in 1 Thess. i. 6: they "received the word in much affliction."

But as the gospel must be received, so it may be received unprofitably, ineffectually, and in vain. And for the opening of this, the gospel may be said to be received in vain in two respects :

First. *In regard of the manner of receiving.*

Secondly. *In regard of the event or the issue of receiving it.*

First. *It is received in vain in regard of the manner of receiving it.*

1. And that is, *when we receive the gospel, but not with an empty hand.*—When the grace of the gospel is not so received, as to be empty of the opinion of our own works and righteousness. This is a vain, empty reception; for “the rich” are “sent empty away.” (Luke i. 53.)

2. *It is received in vain when it is not received with the highest estimation and valuation.*—When it is not looked upon to be “worthy of all acceptation,” as the apostle expresseth it, 1 Tim. i. 15; when it is not received as a pearl, as a jewel of greatest price. If all be not sold for it, soon will it be left for any thing.\*

3. *When it is not received with the greatest ardency of desire, with hungering and thirsting after the benefits contained in it.*—All the inclinations of our souls towards all earthly objects we owe to the benefits of the gospel; which, if we pursue not ardently, we shall never procure successfully.†

4. *When we do not receive it with a particular fiducial application of Jesus Christ upon the warrant of the infallible gospel, but only by a general assent.*—When we receive it into our heads by light, but do not receive it into our hearts by faith. When we do not believe with the heart, but only assent with the head. When we receive it only into our ears, and into our lips, and into our professions; but do not receive it as the good seed, which is to be laid-up in the furrows and the soil of the soul.

Thus the gospel is received in vain in regard of the manner of receiving it.

Secondly. *It is received in vain in regard of the issue, the event, of receiving it; and that several ways:—*

1. *When it is not received so as to purify the heart, as to kill corruption.*—When this grace of God doth not teach us effectually to “deny ungodliness and worldly lusts;” when men will have an *angelical* gospel, but will live *diabolical* lives; when they are not thrown into the mould of the gospel, and have not hearts and practices suitable to it.

2. *When it doth not quicken us to new obedience.*—When there is a receiving without returning, without any activity for God in holy walking; where there is no “delight in the law of God;” when “his commandments are grievous;” when the law doth only compel, but the spirit of the gospel doth not incline, our wills to the obedience of the gospel; when, by the receiving of the gospel, we are not made a “willing people,” to give up ourselves to God in the ways of duty; “when faith is not made incarnate,” as Luther speaks, “by maintaining good works.” (Titus iii. 8.)

\* This sentence, the concluding clause in the next paragraph, and the quotation from Luther at the bottom of the page, formed no part of the first impression.—EDIT.

† The sentiment which the author wished to convey, seems to have been this: “The same appetency or inclination of the soul which we naturally manifest toward all earthly objects, is due by us, with greater reason, to the benefits of the gospel,” &c.—EDIT.

3. *When we so receive grace as that it doth not sustain us in our troubles, nor bear us up in our sufferings.*—When it is not a “word of patience,” as it is called, Rev. iii. 10: “Thou hast kept the word of my patience.” The gospel duly received as to the issue of its reception, maketh us patient to bear whatever is displeasing and ungrateful unto sense. When we see that the justice of God is satisfied, we can easily bear the injustice of men. When we see that God’s wrath is appeased towards us, we shall look upon the wrath of man, yea, all outward troubles, to be cold and feeble.

4. *When we so receive grace as not to impart it and communicate it unto others.*—If we be *living* we shall be *lively* Christians; if we have the life of grace in us, we shall warm others. If we *do* no good, it is a sign we have *got* no good. If there be a spiritual life bestowed upon us by the gospel, there is always a seminal virtue, an inclination to disseminate and to scatter grace among others.

5. And, lastly: *Grace is received in vain as to the issue of our receiving of it, when it is so received, as that thereby we do not obtain salvation.*—It is “the gospel of salvation:” but a mere visible owning of the gospel saveth none. The receiving of it into your houses, into your heads, into your mouths, brings not any to heaven. ‘Christ will profess to those that are empty professors, and only have externally,’ and as to the outward privileges of grace, received the gospel: “I never knew you: depart from me.” (Matt. vii. 23.) We are not only to receive the privileges of grace, but grace by the privilege, if we expect glory.

Thus I have shown what is meant by the grace of God, and what by the receiving of it in vain. And this shall serve for explaining the exhortation, (the first part,) “Receive not the grace of God in vain.”

## SECTION IV.

II. The second part to be opened, is that which contains **THE REASONS** of this exhortation: and they are these two:

1. The **FIRST** is the reason of the apostle’s giving this exhortation or caution against the receiving of the grace of God in vain; namely, because we are, saith he, “workers together.” We read it, “workers together with him.” But in the Greek it is only “workers together,” not *with him*. And there are several expositions given of this expression, “workers together.” Calvin thinks that this “working together” doth intend the working together with the doctrine delivered by the apostle: as if the apostle intended, that it was his duty, not only to deliver the truths and the doctrines of the gospel, but to work together with those truths and doctrines, by way of urging and exhorting, or by urging those doctrines with exhortations to make them effectual; and therefore, saith he, *Non satis est docere nisi urgeas*: “It is not enough doctrinally to inform people what is the truth; but we must urge it upon them with motives, inducements, and persuasions,” that may make the doctrine embraced. And the Syriac seems to favour this exposition, which renders the word *συνεργουντες*, “working together,” *promoventes hoc negotium*; as if “the work” of doctrinal information “were to be promoted” by arguments and incitements to the embracing of the truth. Others conceive

that this "working together" is to be referred to the common mutual endeavours of ministers, who are to be "fellow-helpers" one with another: as if the apostle had said, "All we ministers, working together to further our Master's work in the conversion and salvation of your souls, beseech you," &c. Chrysostom refers this "working together" to the mutual endeavours of ministers and people: as if Paul had said, "We apostles work together with you, to whom we preach, in this work of your receiving the grace of God, by our exhortations to incite you to comply with the duties propounded in the gospel." Our English interpreters, by putting-in these words "with him," understand the apostle to intend a working together with God; and indeed ministers are called "labourers with God." (1 Cor. iii. 9.) I see no reason why we should reject this exposition, if we take it with these two cautions:—

(1.) First. Ministers in this working with God must be looked upon so to use their abilities, as not implanted in them by nature, but bestowed on them by grace, that so they may be made apt and fit instruments by the grace of God to work. Therefore the apostle saith, "Who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament." (2 Cor. iii. 6.) And so in 1 Cor. xv. 10: "By the grace of God," saith he, "I am what I am; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." His power and ability to work he attributes merely to the grace of God. And all "our sufficiency is of God." (2 Cor. iii. 5.)

(2.) Secondly. If you take this to be the meaning of it, that *we are fellow-workers with God*; you must understand, that what is the main and principal in this work, which is *the bestowing of spiritual life and growth*, must be looked upon as *only the work of God*, and to come from him; and that therein man had no share at all, nor is a co-worker with God in it. And, as Beza well notes on 1 Cor. iii. 9, we must always observe carefully a difference between causes subordinate, and causes co-ordinate. Ministers are to be considered as purely in subordination to God, and as those whom God is pleased to make use of in the way of his appointment; not in the way of effectual concurrence with God, as if they could communicate any power or strength to the working of grace by the preaching of the word. Subordinate causes ministers are *to*, not co-ordinate causes *with*, God in the great work of producing of our salvation, which God only hath in his own hand, both as to the internal working of grace in the soul, and the eternal bestowing of glory upon us in the life to come. There is the first reason opened; that is, the reason why the apostle doth here give them his exhortation, namely, "We are workers together with God."

#### SECTION V.

2. The **SECOND** is, the reason why the apostle doth put them upon this great duty of "not receiving the grace of God in vain." And that is taken from that text in Isai. xlix. 8, where there is this promise made unto Christ: "I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in a day of salvation have I succoured thee." These are the words of the promise that God the Father maketh unto Christ as Mediator; which is, that, in

his discharging of the great work of saving his church, God the Father will answer and succour him, as the Head of the church, and show it by granting him *a day and a time* for the bestowing of efficacious grace upon his members, by making the means of grace effectual for their salvation; which time is here called “an accepted time,” and “a day of salvation:” because this time, and this day, is the time and the day of God’s free favour, in which he will so accept of sinners, as to show his gracious good-will unto them in accepting of them to life, and in working by his Son Jesus Christ salvation and deliverance for them. Now this is a very forcible argument and reason against the receiving of the grace of God in vain; namely, because there was such a rich treasure and measure of saving and efficacious grace in the time of the gospel to be dispensed to the church; therefore they should labour to have their share in it, and not to receive the gospel of grace vainly and unprofitably, as they would approve themselves to be the members of Christ, and those for whom Christ hath prayed unto the Father that they might have saving grace bestowed upon them. And this shall serve for opening the second part of this text; namely, the reason of the apostle’s laying down this exhortation, both in regard of himself, because he was a worker with God; and in regard of the Corinthians, it was because God the Father had made a promise to Christ the Head of the church, that grace should be bestowed, saving, effectual grace; not grace in vain, but grace bringing forth salvation should be afforded, “in an accepted time and in a day of salvation,” by the administration of the gospel.

## SECTION VI.

III. The third part, which is that which I intend to insist upon, is the apostle’s ACCOMMODATION, or his APPLICATION of the foregoing reason, taken out of Isai. xlix. 8, unto the present state and time of the Corinthians, by giving them this quickening counsel; that, since the present season of grace which they enjoyed now was “the accepted time” and “the day of salvation” promised unto Christ for his people, they should therefore now regard, and for the present improve, it profitably. The sum of the apostle’s application is this: Since God hath in the foregoing reason assigned a certain time and day for the exhibition and the bestowment of his grace, it followeth, that all times and all days are not fitted for that purpose, but only the time and the day foretold by the prophet, in which God would freely accept of sinners and bring them to salvation; and therefore Paul putteth the Corinthians upon the present improvement of the season of grace, because God had now bestowed upon them that accepted time and the day of salvation foretold in the foregoing reason, which they could not neglect without hazarding the loss of divine acceptation, and their own eternal salvation.

All that I have further to do is to handle this third part, which is the apostle’s *accommodation*, or *application* of the former reason, taken out of the prophet Isaiah, unto the present state of the Corinthians, by giving them this quickening counsel; namely, to improve this present season of grace, which the prophet foretold of old should be bestowed upon the church in the days of the gospel: “Behold, now is the accepted time;

behold, now is the day of salvation." Now this quickening counsel hath two parts :—

1. *An awakening incitement to improve the present season of grace.*—This *awakening incitement* is contained in the repeated note thereof, "Behold!" "Behold!" *The present season of grace* is intended in the repeated note thereof, "Now," "now."

2. *A double argument to convince us of the fitness and necessity of this duty, NOW, FOR THE PRESENT, to improve the season of grace.*—The first argument is taken from *the fitness of the season for working in it*, and so it is called "the time," "the day." The second argument is taken from *the advantageousness of the present season to the worker*, and so it is called the "time accepted" and the "day of salvation."

Now all that I shall further do shall be to handle these two arguments: and in the handling of them I shall only endeavour these two things :—

I. *To open the sense and meaning of these two arguments.*

II. *To show the force and strength of both these arguments to engage us to improve the present season of grace.*

#### OPENING OF THE FIRST ARGUMENT.

*I shall explain the sense of these first two arguments in their order.* And,

FIRST. The sense of the first argument taken from *the fitness of the season for working*, as it is called "the time" and "the day." And, herein, first, I shall explain the word "time," secondly, the word "day."

#### SECTION VII.

1. First. By "time" is not here meant the flux, succession, or continuation of time by minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, which we call "the space" of time; but by "time," according to the signification of the word in the Greek, I understand the tempestivity or opportunity of time. For in the Greek it is *καιρος*, which signifies "season or opportunity, a time accommodated and fitted to employment;" in which we may undertake our heavenly business with hope of success. When time and means meet together in conjunction, then they produce opportunity. This seasonableness or tempestivity of time is therefore, not unfitly, called by some "the grace of time," "the flower of time," and "that to time which the flower is to the stalk," *καιρος ανθος χρονου*, which cream is to the milk, which lustre is to the metal. In civil undertakings, as trading, ploughing, and sowing, "opportunity is," as one saith, "the grace of time;" but in spiritual undertakings, opportunity is *the time of grace*, the time fitted and suited by God for the benefiting of our souls by the means of grace. It is as the angel's stirring in the water, into which he that stepped first was healed. It is as the day of a prince's audience for the answering of petitions. It is as the opening of heaven-gates unto them that strive for entrance. It is as the spiritual market-day for the procuring of saving provisions for our souls, upon which we are to live for ever.



## SECTION VIII.

2. Secondly. The season of grace is called "a day." For the opening of this: the word "day" in scripture is sometimes taken for the natural day, consisting of twenty-four hours, including also the night; and so it is taken in Christ's directory for prayer, which we commonly call "the Lord's Prayer:"—*Directory*, I say; for I conceive, with learned Grotius, Christ doth not command *verba recitari*, "the words thereof to be repeated;" but "he commands us only to draw all the matter of our prayers out of it," *materiam precum hinc promi præcipit*:—wherein, when we pray for our daily bread day by day, doubtless we pray for what is needful for the night too as well as the day; for sleep is the bread of the night. Therefore by "day" *there*, must be meant the whole natural day, consisting of twenty-four hours. Sometimes the word "day" is taken for an artificial day distinguished from the night: "In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night." (Gen. xxxi. 40.) Sometimes the word "day" is taken improperly and figuratively in the scriptures; and so sometimes it is taken for an age, and for a year; sometimes for a fit occasion or season of doing any thing; as in John ix. 4: "I must do the work of him that sent me, while it is day." And so the season of receiving good, as well as doing good, is called a day: "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that concern thy peace:" (Luke xix. 41, 42:) that is, in the season wherein they have been manifested unto thee by me. So here by "day" I understand the fit season of procuring salvation by improving the means for obtaining thereof.

This briefly for the opening of the first argument, which is the fitness of the present season of grace for our working: it is called "the time," "the day."

## SECTION IX. OPENING OF THE SECOND ARGUMENT.

SECONDLY. To open the second argument, and that is *the advantage-ousness of the present season to the worker*.—And it is called "the accepted time" first, and, secondly, "the day of salvation." I shall open both these in their order; and,

1. First. *This time is called accepted*.—The word for "accepted," in the Greek *ευπροσδεκτος*, in this its composition imports "a well-pleasing," yea, "a very much accepted time." The Hebrew word *רצף* *ratson*, from whence it is taken, signifies "the time of free-grace, free-favour, or free good-will." It is taken out of Isaiah xlix. 8; and the Seventy Interpreters, they render it, in Psalm lxix. 13, *καιρος ευδοκίας*, "a time of free favour, free good-will;" and Symmachus renders it *καιρος αλλαγης*, "a time of reconciliation;" a time wherein God will graciously accept sinners out of free-grace to be reconciled unto them. For when time is said here to "be accepted," and "an accepted time," it is to be understood figuratively, as intending the time wherein God will by free grace accept of man, or wherein God is pleased, out of his free good will, to show himself *benevolentem hominibus*, as Grotius expresseth it,

“gracious and favourable to man,” in that way of accepting him through Christ.

## SECTION X.

2. *The season of grace is called “the day of salvation,” further to show the advantageousness of this season unto the improvers thereof.*—We must not take “salvation” here so largely as for “deliverance from any evil or danger,” or “the preservation from any trouble or distress.” Nor must we take “salvation” here so strictly and narrowly as to import only “eternal salvation in heaven;” as it is taken in Rom. xiii. 11: “Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed;” and “heirs of salvation.” (Heb. i. 14.) Nor must you take it so strictly as to import only “the means of salvation,” as it doth often in the scripture: “The salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles.” (Acts xxviii. 28.) But “salvation” in this place comprehends both that happiness which is perfect and complete in heaven, and also the entrance into it, and the beginning of it in this life; fitness for salvation here, and the fulness of salvation hereafter. In which sense the Gospel is called the “gospel of salvation,” in Eph. i. 13; and “the word of salvation,” in Acts xiii. 26; and the “long-suffering of our Lord” is to be accounted “salvation,” in 2 Peter iii. 15: by “salvation” in these places being meant a fitness for eternal salvation by receiving the gospel and improving the long-suffering of God and the means of grace, and our being brought to the full fruition of it in glory. So, in this place, “the day of salvation” is that season wherein God bestows an entrance into salvation here, followed with a full perfection of it hereafter.

And so I have opened the sense of these two arguments, whereby the apostle urgeth us to the present improvement of the season of grace, both as this is a season of fitness for working, and so called *a time, a day*; and as it is a season of advantageousness to the worker, and so called *an accepted time*, wherein God accepts of sinners to be reconciled to them, and *a day of salvation*, by the improving whereof God will certainly bring his people to the fruition and the perfect participation of life and salvation in heaven.

## THE FORCE OF THE TWO ARGUMENTS.

Now having thus explained and opened the sense of these two arguments, I shall only, **IN THE SECOND PLACE,**

Show you the force and strength of them both distinctly, to engage us to a present improvement of the season of grace.

## SECTION XI. FORCE OF THE FIRST ARGUMENT.

(I.) And, **FIRST,** I shall show you the force of the first argument; and that is *the fitness of this present season of grace for our working and employment.*—It is, saith the apostle, 1. The time, 2. The day.

1. *It is the time.*—I showed you, in the explaining of the sense of the first argument, the meaning of the word “time.” I told you it did clearly import *tempestivity, opportunity*, the flower, the cream, the lustre, the beauty, of time. But how doth this consideration, that the present

season of grace is the time of opportunity, urge and enforce the duty of a present improving of the season of grace? In answer whereunto I offer these following considerations:—

The first is this: *The time of opportunity is that which we may easily let slip.*—It is *tempus labile*, “a time that may easily slip between our fingers,” especially in spiritual concerns. It is needful therefore *now*, instantly, to lay hold upon it. Opportunity is hardly embraced. The learned Pharisees could not discern their opportunity by discerning the signs of Christ’s coming, as you have it in Matt. xvi. 3, and the beginning. Nor could the Jews know their opportunity; it was “hidden from their eyes.” (Luke xix. 42.) “Who is as the wise man?” saith Solomon, in Eccles. viii. 1; that is, how rarely is the wise man to be found! Where is he to be found? But why so? “The wise man’s heart,” saith he, “discerneth both time and judgment;” (Eccles. viii. 5;) that is, he is able to judge when things are to be done; and therefore it is rare to find such a wise man. Embracing of opportunity is a wisdom that God alone must teach us, by considering the shortness of our time, to be so wise as to improve it. (Psalm xc. 12.) And God concealeth the season, the nick, the juncture of time, wherein he will bestow grace upon us; because he would have us always watchful, and dependent upon him, humble and serious in regarding every season. It is easy to know seasons for civil affairs; easy to know the season of a trade, to sow, to reap, to buy, to sell. But, in those affairs that concern our souls, it is hard to find out when they are to be performed. Opportunity is so very short and sudden, and men are so blinded with avocations, pleasures, prejudices, and vain hopes, that sometimes these make the season of regarding their souls appear *too soon*. Sometimes they are so blinded with fear and discouragements, by dangers and difficulties, and seeming impossibilities, that they think it *too late*. So that, indeed, between sinful hope and fear, it is hard to pitch upon the right season and nick of time for the saving of our souls. In every business, but especially saving business, the most difficult part of the work is the due limiting of it. In our voyage to heaven it is hard to save our tide: not one of a thousand but lets it slip.

Secondly. *Opportunity must be presently embraced and improved, because the improving of it is a man’s greatest wisdom.*—They are called wise, who so consider their latter end, as that they pursue the present season of duty. (Deut. xxxii. 29.) They are the wise that “discern both time and judgment;” (Eccles. viii. 5;) that is, that discern the opportunity so as to have judgment for the embracing of it. Therefore, in Eccles. x. 2, the “wise man’s heart is” said to be “at his right hand;” that is, the wisdom of his heart teacheth him to dispatch his affairs judiciously and dexterously both for manner and season. The want of this wisdom in discerning the season, maketh a man like unto a beast. (Psalm xlix. 20.) It is worse to be *like a beast* than to be *a beast*. To be *a beast* is no sin, and comparatively no punishment; but to be *like a beast* is both, in a high degree. Yea, the very brute creatures,—they are far wiser than is he that neglects his opportunity of grace. “The stork, the turtle, the crane, and the swallow observe” their seasons of

“coming” into several countries. (Jer. viii. 7.) They know their appointed season; “but my people know not the judgment of the Lord;” [do] not discern the course or manner of God’s dealings, so as to embrace duty and avoid danger. It is called a fool’s property to want a heart, when he hath a price, that is, an opportunity, put into his “hand to get wisdom.” (Prov. xvii. 16.) And therefore the five virgins, even for this piece of folly, are called “foolish” even to a proverb; because they were not so wise as to know their opportunity. And let a man be never so prudent for the world, if he knoweth not the season of grace, he is a mere scripture-fool, and will appear so to himself, and others too, to all eternity. And when he comes to die he shall be compelled to say, “Never was I wise, who was wise for every thing but to save my soul!”

Thirdly. *Opportunity urgeth us to the present improvement of it, because it facilitates and maketh easy every action and employment, making a work come off sweetly, smoothly, and with facility.*—It is as the laying of the knife upon the joint, when we would divide the bone. It is wind and tide to the oars of industry. It is as when blowing and rowing go together. God in an opportunity offereth to work with us. That which is done with another’s help is easily done when both parties join in the doing of it. Two men lifting at a burden make the lifting more easy. The less of opportunity in our transactions, always the more of difficulty. The top of time is flour; but the deeper you go, the further you depart from opportunity, there is the more of bran, the more of dregs. It was observed by Seneca in this very case, *Non tantum minimum in imo, sed pessimum*: “There is not only the least, but the worst, in the bottom of opportunity; and the best of opportunity is at the top.”

Fourthly. *Opportunity must presently be embraced, because it maketh every action look beautiful.*—It makes all our performances look with a lovely aspect, and with a grace. “God hath made every thing beautiful in its time,” or “in his time.” (Eccles. iii. 11.) “Fruit brought forth in season” is the pleasantest fruit. The wine of grapes gathered in their vintage and season,—how grateful and generous is it to the taste! But if the grapes be rotten, and hang *beyond their season*, their liquor loseth its gratefulness and delightfulness. Esau’s tears, after the season of giving the blessing was past, were nothing worth: they were as the juice of grapes that were rotten. “A word spoken in season” is a “word upon the wheel;” it cometh readily and acceptably unto the ear. To seek after God and the good of our souls in the season of grace,—O how lovely is it! When season is gone, our endeavours are unpleasant to God, as well as unprofitable unto us.

Fifthly. *Opportunity must be presently improved, because we are deeply accountable for every opportunity.*—Not only for the actions we do are we countable, but for the time which he had to do them in. Jezebel was plagued for her neglecting the time of repenting, in Rev. ii. 21: “I gave her space to repent; and she repented not.” For the neglecting youthful seasons the young man must “be brought into judgment.” (Eccles. xi. 9.) If you must give account for every idle word, surely for every idle sermon, for every idle sabbath, for every idle ordinance; I mean,

under which you have been idle. If for every idle word you speak, much more for every unprofitable sermon you make the minister preach.

Sixthly. *Opportunity must be presently improved : for the neglecting of opportunity destroys the most.*—All our salvation dependeth upon Christ, as to the *meriting* of it ; but it dependeth upon opportunity as to the *obtaining* of it. The neglecting of opportunity is the greatest destroyer in the world. It is not so much the being bad, as the delaying to be good, that undoeth the most. It was not riotousness, but sleepiness, that excluded the foolish virgins. “The misery of man is” therefore “great” upon the earth ; because he doth not understand judiciously his “time” required “to every purpose.” (Eccles. viii. 6.) It is not flat denial, but foolish delayings, that ruin Christians. All that the devil pretends to desire is your *now*, your present opportunity ; he will offer God thy *tomorrow*. He seemeth to be mannerly and modest in bringing men to damnation : *Da mihi quod nunc, et Deo futurum* : “Let me have but the present time, and give God all the future.” We miss of heaven by saying to God, as Felix did to Paul, “Go thy way for this time.” (Acts xxiv. 25.) Few deny, but most delay, to be saved ; and hereby Satan doeth his work both plausibly and effectually. Delays put the likeliest and the handsomest cheat in the world upon a sinner. Most are damned by delaying to be saved. And because every age hopes to live *that which is to come*, it liveth not *that which is now present*.

Seventhly. *Opportunity must be presently improved for the soul, because it is embraced, by all, in lowest concerns for the body.*—The husbandman, the merchant, the lawyer, the seaman,—they all mind their opportunity, their season. Yea, for the very cutting of trees we observe our times. Yea, the fittest seasons are embraced for sinful undertakings : the thief observeth the removal of the watch, the sleepiness of the inhabitant ; the harlot, like the owl, flieth abroad in the twilight ; yea, the devil makes use of the shortness of his time to increase his rage. And shall opportunities for our salvation be only neglected ? What, Christians, only fools for our souls ? I have read a story in an old author concerning a devout man, who, after the sun was some hours up, went to the chamber-door of an old bishop, and the bishop being asleep in his bed, the good man knocked at his door, using these words, “The sparrows are awaked and a-chirping ; and is it fit for bishops to be sleeping ?” And may not I rather say, The men of the world, persons of all employments and trades, yea, the sons of violence,—they embrace their season, they are up betimes ; and shall the people of God, shall professors then be asleep when these are awake and active ?

## SECTION XII.

2. The season of grace is called “a day ;” and as it is here so called it eminently engageth us to the present improving of the season of grace, and that in two regards :—

(1.) *In regard of the nature of the season, it is here called “a day.”*

(2.) *In regard of those who are or should be workers in that day.*

(1.) **FIRST.** *In the regard of the nature of the season, it is called a day.*—And this urgeth us to the present improving of it : for,

*First. It is a day, and it is but a day ; and that is but a short time.*—

It is not called "a year, a month." It doth not last long. It is but for a while. Had Jonah prophesied to the Ninevites, that within forty years Nineveh should be destroyed; if the Ninevites had not derided him, yet it is very probable they would have delayed their repentance. But when he told them "yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown," this startled and quickened them unto a present repentance. Our season is here expressed by the term of "a day," one day. Yea, our day is but a short one. We have indeed a summer's day for clearness; but it is a winter's day for shortness. "While it is called to-day," saith the apostle, "exhort one another." (Heb. iii. 13.) We have not so much time that you should be prodigal of it. He that is profuse of a minute in this day, (poor prodigal!) spendeth above his estate. Time, in the whole compass of it, is but short; (1 Cor. vii. 29;) the time of particular persons is shorter; and the time of season and present opportunity is the shortest of all. Our precious season, our day,—it is but like the few sands in the little middle hole of the hour-glass. The sand in the upper glass is uncertain whether ever to run one sand more, or no; that is *the time to come*. That in the lower glass is as *the time spent and past*. But the few sands in the narrow middle hole are as the present season, and only ours. *Non tam liberale nobis dedit tempus natura, ut aliquid ex eo liceat perdere*, saith Seneca: "Nature hath not dealt so liberally with us, as that it doth allow us to mis-spend any of the little time it hath given us." We are prodigal of time, though covetous of a penny. We are more profuse of our time, *cujus unius honesta est avaritia*, "of which alone there is an honest covetousness." You may have many pieces of gold together in your hand; but you can have but one day of grace at once: it is but one day.

Secondly. *It is a day; and therefore that which cannot be recalled when it is spent and done.*—The loss of a day is an irrecoverable loss. Who can restore the loss of a day? *Nec cursum supprimit, nec revocat, tempus*: "Time doth neither suppress its course, nor recall it; neither doth it slack it, nor revoke it." As time stops not, so time returns not. If thy house be burnt, or thy goods stolen, or thy lands forfeited, friends can make a supply of those losses. But if all thy friends, nay, creatures in heaven and in earth, should conspire to make thee happy, they cannot, with all their combined industry and united forces, restore to thee one of those good hours in the day of grace that thou hast foolishly mis-spent. Esau lost his day, and he could not recall it with tears. The knocking of the foolish virgins could not break open the shut door of heaven. When thy sun is set, and thy day completely ended, thy sun will never rise more. I have heard of one that wantonly threw a jewel into the sea; and they say the jewel was brought to him in the belly of a fish that was served up to his table. I know not how true this is: but who or what shall ever bring back to thee the jewel of thy lost day? None shall ever bring back this jewel to thy table, if thou wilt throw it away by wantonness and negligence. God will not turn thy glass when it is once out. What the fall was to angels, that is death to man.

Thirdly. *It is a day; and this should put us upon the present improving of it; for it is a clear day, a lightsome day.*—"The Sun of righteousness" is risen. "The day-spring from on high hath visited" our

horizon with the light of the gospel. Now a lightsome, a sun-shiny day is to be regarded, improved, for the present. It is a dark day indeed, compared with heaven; but it is light, compared with the shadows of Judaism, or the fogs of Popery. Work, work! work apace, you that have the sun-shine of the gospel! I wish I could not say, "I see a cloud far bigger than a man's hand, and I hear a noise of much rain." Now you have sun-shine: cock your hay; shock your corn apace; wanton not away your summer, lest you beg in winter. God, by giving of you so fair a day, showeth not that your sun will always shine, but that now thou shouldest work. Slumber not away a sun-shiny day in harvest. The day, and such a day, is surely intended for working. "Man goeth forth to his work till the evening:" the night is for sleep; but the day, especially a sun-shiny day, a clear day, for working.

Fourthly. *It is a day; and therefore puts us upon the present improving of it; because it is a wasting day, a day that passeth and runneth apace.*—We usually say, "The day is far spent." The day goeth, whether you sit still or no. The sun runs, yea, like a giant, like a strong man, though thou creepest like a cripple. Though the passenger sleeps in the ship, the ship carrieth him apace towards his haven. Thou art idle; but time hurrieth thee to the grave. Time is winged: thy hour-glass needs no jogging: there is no stopping the stream of time. It was a notable speech of one once to a person that was in a fit of anger: "Sir," saith he, *Domine, sol ad occasum*: "The sun is going down." This is my caution to every lazy Christian: if the sun must not go down upon *your wrath*, surely it must much less go down upon *your loitering*. If the sun in the heavens must not go down upon your wrath, the sun of your life should not be suffered to go down upon your laziness. *Cum celeritate temporis utendi velocitate certandum est*, saith Seneca: "Our swiftness in work must contend with the swiftness of the time in which we work." Thou dost not see thy time *going*; but shortly thou wilt see it *gone*; like the insensible moving hand of a dial, which, though thou dost not see it moving, yet thou seest it hath moved.

Fifthly. *It is a day; and therefore puts us upon the present improving of it.*—For it is possible yet, that *in this thy day*, thy work may be done, before sun-set, if thou beest speedy. Despair not; for then industry will be frozen. The bridge of mercy is not yet drawn: there is yet a possibility for thee to get over to a blessed eternity. It is bad to say, "It is too soon," though most have said so too often; but it is worse to say, "It is too late." I confess, thy morning was thy golden hour, and had been far the fittest for thy employment; but the evening time is better than no time. I dare not write **DESPAIR** upon any man's forehead. If God will help us, much work may be done in a little time; but yet God must step-in with a miracle almost, if thou shouldest run back the mis-spent age of forty or fifty years in an hour or two: surely, you must fly rather than run.

Sixthly. *It is a day, and, for aught you know, it may be your last day; and therefore improve that present day.*—You have no assurance of another: from the upper glass of the hour-glass, thou canst not be assured of one sand more. Often say thou, therefore, to the day wherein thou livest, "Art thou my last, or may I look for another?" Though thou

art young, it may prove thy last day : death taketh us not by seniority. The new pitcher may be as easily broken as the old. And, which is a more severe consideration, the Spirit of God possibly may never knock at the door of thy heart again, never strive *in* thee, never strive *with* thee ! Death may knock next ; and, remember, he will easily break into thy body, though thy minister could not get into thy soul. Death never cometh *without a warrant* ; yet it often comes *without a warning*. We do not live *by patent*, but we live *at pleasure*. How knowest thou that the candle of the ministry shall shine one sabbath longer ? The message shall always live, but the messenger is always dying. The clods of the earth may soon stop that mouth that so frequently and unfruitfully hath given thee the word of life. He, the light now of his place and of his people, may be blown out by violence, as well as burnt out by death. Thou canst not say but God may soon make that ear of thine deaf that now thou stoppest : God may soon blind those eyes which now thou shuttest. It is a *peradventure* whether God will ever give repentance or no. God hath made many promises *to* repentance ; but he hath made none *of* repentance. If to-day thou sayest *thou wilt not*, to-morrow thou mayest say *thou canst not*, pray. It is just with God, that he who while he liveth forgets God, when he dies should forget himself. I have heard of a profane miscreant, that being put upon speedy repentance and turning to God, scoffingly answered : “ If I do but say three words when I come to die,” (*Miserere mei, Domine* : “ Lord, have mercy upon me !”) “ I am sure to be happy.” This miserable wretch shortly after, falling from his horse, and receiving thereby a deadly wound, had indeed time to speak three words, as the relation informed me ; but those three words were these : *Diabolus capiat omnia*, “ Let the devil take all.” Thou dost not know what thy last words shall be : the very motions of thy tongue and of thy heart are all in the hands of that God whose grace thou hast despised.

Seventhly. *It is a day : that requireth present improvement ; because it is followed with a night, a night that is dark as pitch.*—“ The night cometh wherein no man can work.” So saith our Lord, John ix. 4. There is neither work nor invention in the grave. In the dark thou mayest see to bewail thy not working in the light ; but in the dark there is no working. Sorrow then will not help thee, couldest thou make hell to swim with thy tears. Thy tears are only of worth in time. Put not off your working, till the time wherein you must leave work. It is perfect madness, not to think of beginning to work till the time of working is at an end. *Nemo, fuitis vundinis, exercet mercaturam* : “ What man, after the fair, will go then to buy and sell ? There is no negotiation, but in the time of the fair,” the season of grace. The spiritual manna of grace is only to be gathered in the six days of thy life. The time after this is a time of rest, wherein there is no more work to be done to procure salvation. If this be the day of thy death, to-morrow cannot be the day of thy repentance. It is miserable to have that to do for lack of time, which is to do for loss of time.

Thus I have shown you, how we are put upon present improving the season of grace, as it is here termed a day, or in respect of the nature of the season.



## SECTION XIII.

(2.) SECONDLY. *In regard of the workers in this day, we are urged from hence to a present improving of the season of grace.*

First. *How little have we wrought in this day of grace!*—What a pitiful account (and yet an account must be given) of this day can we give unto God, of thousands of sabbaths, and repetitions of ordinances, and opportunities of life, that we have enjoyed! You have been perhaps long in the world and under the means of grace; but can you say, you have lived long? It is one thing for passengers in a ship to be a great while tossed in the sea, and another thing for them to sail a great way. You have been long in the world, tossed up and down with many temptations, and impetuous corruptions, and violent affections; but which of you have sailed much, or gone forward in your course to heaven with any considerable progress? Little is to be seen in the copies of your lives beside blots and empty spaces. Much paper hath been spent with wide lines. Had you not need now, toward the end of the side, to write the closer, to “redeem the time,” as the apostle expresseth it? (Eph. v. 16.) We should redeem our time out of the hands of those that have taken it captive, out of the clutches of those vain employments that have so often taken it captive. Now, in all redemptions there is the laying down a price for the party that is redeemed. But what is that price you are to lay down for your time, when it is to be redeemed? I will tell you: *Id quod perdis pretium est*, saith Augustine: “That which you lose” in your worldly employments, in your idle recreations, in your vain visits, in your exorbitant eatings and drinkings, that time that you take from these to give to God and your souls, “that is the price that you lay down” for the redeeming of seasons for your souls. It is miserable for our work to be undone for want of time when we are dying, when it is undone for the loss of time while we are living.

Secondly. *How great is the woe of those whose day is done, and yet their work is not done, but still to do!*—You have seen their end upon earth; but you have not heard their cries and their self-bewailings in hell. How many have been cut off before your eyes, who ceased to be before they began to live! Improve examples, lest you become examples. Your schooling is cheap, when it is at the cost of another. Let the lashes of divine severity that have fallen upon others, quicken thee in thy spiritual pace and travelling towards heaven. Why should God stay for you rather than for them? Thou canst not mis-spend thy time at so cheap a rate, as they did by whom God hath warned thee. Hell is not so full of souls as it is of delayed purposes. What would not lost souls give for a crumb of that time of which now in this world they make orts? \* If the foresight of their tears for neglecting the day of grace fetched tears from Christ, (Luke xix. 41, 42,) how great shall the feeling be of the eternal effects of their inexcusable folly! How exuberant, but unfruitful, shall be the flood of their own tears for their former slothfulness, never enough to be bewailed, because never at all to be repaired! Surely a small loss could not draw tears from so great a person as the Son of God!

\* R: fuse, or fragments.—EDIT.

Thirdly. *Many, by beginning betimes in the morning of their day, have done more work than thou, a delayer, canst now accomplish.*—They should provoke thee to a holy jealousy. They, setting forth for heaven in the morning, have travelled further in that morning than thou hast done in that long summer's day wherein thou hast been slothful. What a shame is it that some should be green-headed saints, and thou a grey-headed sinner? Julius Cæsar, as Suetonius reports, reading that Alexander had conquered the world in his youthful age, professed his shame that he, who was so much older than Alexander, should come so far behind him in obtaining victorious glory: this fired Cæsar with noble emulation to exceed him. Envy is ever bad; but emulation may be holy. Envy is a trouble for another's eminency; but emulation is a troubling of ourselves for not arriving to another's commendable excellency.

Fourthly. *In this thy day of working, and in thy working, thou art but a slow worker.*—Thou hast a great journey, and art a slow, sluggish passenger. Thou hast a load of corruption that presseth thee down. Thou sailest against the tide of corrupt nature. Thou hast an encumbering body of death, that will hinder thee from doing even what thou art a-doing; a long garment that hindereth and hampereth thee, when thou endeavourest to be speediest in thy course for heaven. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit; so that thou canst not do the things that thou wouldest." (Gal. v. 17.) There are many thieves in thy candle of time, which daily waste it; sleeping, eating, drinking, visiting, being visited, and a great many other worldly avocations, employments, enjoyments, that must be regarded together with thy soul. These are as so many places, at which we must call-in, as we are in our journey; and the dispatching of every errand in every one of these places will take us up much time. Hard it is for our hearts to be preserved from too deep an engagement in them; the world more frequently bewitching from God, than admonishing us of God; too often proving as bird-lime to the wings of our affections to hinder their flight heavenward. And many also are the retarding discouragements that all the people of God must meet withal in their course to heaven: as they have the tide of nature against them, so they have the wind of opposition from men and devils against them. Earliness and eagerness in the ways of God are the two things principally opposed by *the god and men of this world*. It is the galloping passenger at whom the dogs of the town most bark, and whom they most pursue. All that travel heavenward have the wind in their faces, though the happiness of their journey's end infinitely more than countervails for the greatest both industry and opposition.

Fifthly. *The longer thou delayest thy working in this day, the harder it will be for thee to begin.*—Sin is as deceitful to detain, as it is to draw. Every moment thou delayest to leave it, it tieth a knot on the cord wherewith it holdeth thee, making thereby thy freedom from it the more difficult. Lust and delay know no measure: and delay knows no measure, because lust knows none. The further you go on, the harder it is, and the more unwilling will you be to go back. The deeper the engagement, the more difficult is the retreat. By delay sin is the more

strengthened, the devil the more emboldened, and God the more provoked. That which in thee to-day is regardlessness, to-morrow may be unwillingness, and the next day obstinateness. *Dum consuetudini non resistitur, fit necessitas*: "Custom in sin will at length turn into necessity of sinning." *Venenata non patiuntur inducias*: "Antidotes against poisons must not be delayed." The longer a bad tenant forbears payment of his rent, the harder it will be for him to get it up. A nail driven into wood is with more difficulty drawn out when it is driven up to the head, than when with a few blows it is weakly fastened. The longer the wood lieth soaking in the water, with the greater difficulty doth it burn. The longer Satan's possession hath been, the more difficult will his ejection be. Every delay makes thy return to God look more like to an impossibility. Goliath must be smitten in the forehead, and Satan opposed betimes. Old age is *ætas indisciplinabilis*, "an indisciplinable age." Childhood is the age of learning. Old age is the time wherein men desire more to teach than be taught.

Sixthly. *As to thy working in this day; the sooner thou beginnest and the faster thou workest in this day of grace, the sweeter will thy sleep be in the evening, when thy day is consummate.*—After thou viewest thy early and thy earnest working for God, in the end of thy life, thou wilt have a sabbath in thy thoughts. None ever repented them either of early beginnings, or constant proceedings, in the ways of holiness. It was a humbling to Paul, that Christ appeared last of all to him; (1 Cor. xv. 8;) and that "Andronicus and Junia were in Christ before him;" that they were his seniors in the faith. (Rom. xvi. 7.) How sweet is it in age to feed upon the comforts of a well-spent youth and manhood! Never put that off to the last that cannot be done too soon. Early beginnings in godliness make an easy death-bed; and acquaintance with God betimes makes thee the more confident to go to him. God will never forget thee in *the end*, who rememberest him in *the beginning*, of thy life. Should you at length look heavenward, yet how will it grieve you that you did not make a more early beginning! The better thou art when thou diest, the more it will trouble thee thou wert holy so late. Early holiness spareth abundance of death-bed trouble. That man who puts off his repentance to his end, dies at the best with little comfort. *Incertus moritur, qui in sine pœnitet*: "If he should repent at last, yet he dies uncertainly," as to future happiness. He rarely knows whither he is going. It is comfortable for a man to be able to say to God when he dies, as one did, *Pœnitentiam egi quando peccare potui*: "Lord, thou knowest, I then repented of sin, when I had strength, and time, and ability, and opportunities to sin."

Thus I have shown you the strength and the force of the first argument, whereby the apostle engageth us to a present improvement of the season of grace; as it is, for its fitness for working, the time, the day.

#### SECTION XIV. FORCE OF THE SECOND ARGUMENT.

(II.) Briefly now, in the SECOND place, to show you the force of the second argument, taken from *the advantageousness of improving the present season of grace to the worker and improver of it*; it being here called,

1. *The time of acceptance :*

2. *The day of salvation.* The first shows the freeness ; the second the fulness. The first shows how cheap the commodity is, that we get by working, and the second how rich it is. The first shows how costless it is, the second how costly it is ; both contained in this golden expression, "The accepted time," and then "the day of salvation."

1. *It is "the accepted time."*—That is, the time of God's free grace and good-will in accepting of sinners ; not so much the accepting of time, as the accepting of sinners in such a time. This expression of God's free good-will in accepting sinners in the season of grace doth notably instruct us to a present improvement of it ; and that especially for these two reasons,

(1.) Because, it being "the accepted time," or time of free grace and good-will, we must for the present improve it *upon the account of gratitude and ingenuity.*

(2.) Because, it being "the accepted time," and the day of God's free grace in accepting of sinners, we must presently improve it *upon the account of real self-interest.*

(1.) *Upon the account of ingenuous gratitude.*—The terms upon which reconciliation is bestowed are all free ; it is free not only in respect of the persons upon whom it is bestowed, who are weak, and unworthy, and polluted, and opposite to God ; but in respect of the terms on which it is bestowed. The terms are free terms. The old friendship between God and man was kept up *by doing* ; but restoring to friendship, or reconciliation, is bestowed *in the way of believing.* We do not buy the favour of God. It is not afforded *secundum pretium*, but *secundum pactum* : "It is not by laying down any valuable consideration for the meriting and purchasing of it ; but it is in the way of doing that which God appoints," and by his free grace is pleased to condescend unto, and that is humble and thankful acceptance. If we buy it, it is with another's purse. Jesus Christ only bought it. We part with nothing for the favour of God, but what is our bane if we keep it. We may keep all but what will kill and damn us. Nor doth our obedience to God, when we accept of reconciliation with him through Christ, make our reconciliation less free ; for the pardon of a traitor may be free, though it be under the condition of future loyalty. Now, then, what is more suitable to ingenuous gratitude, than to embrace the season of God's bestowing so free a favour ? Surely, the least we can do is, to accept of that God that accepteth of us, to accept of him that is so full of loveliness and rewards, we having nothing to bring him but deformity and beggary ! Not to accept his favour presently, argues the height of proud ingratitude ; concerning which God may say, "Have I this for my good-will, for my free grace ? What, not so much as accept of my favour that shall cost thee nothing ? Surely, the least spark of holy ingenuity [ingenuousness] would prompt us to say, with him in a case of infinitely lower concernment, "Lord, 'we accept it always, with all thankfulness ;' what thou offerest freely I accept it readily." What beggar doth not accept of a free alms without delay or dispute ?

## SECTION XV.

(2.) As the season of grace is the accepted time, or the time of God's free acceptance of sinners, *it engageth us to a present improvement of this season of grace upon the account of self-interest*: for the neglecting of free grace makes the divine vengeance,

First, *unavoidable*; and, Secondly, *insupportable*.

First. *Neglecting of free grace makes vengeance unavoidable*.—If grace be neglected, what shall save you? If grace shall not save thee, works cannot save thee. The neglecter of grace concludes himself under a necessity of damnation; he rendeth the book of mercy; he throweth away the remedy, the cordial that serveth for his reviving. He that accepts not of life and salvation by free gift, must have it by earning, must have it by working; and earn it we cannot. Thou canst not obtain reconciliation with God upon easier terms for thyself, than Christ obtained it for believers: and what terms were those, but even perfect, and to thee impossible, obedience? You cannot dig; perfect doing is impossible: you are lost, if ashamed to beg at the door of free grace for the dole of mercy.\*

Secondly. *The neglecting of free grace makes divine vengeance insupportable*.—It discovereth the malignity of the heart against that which by free grace is bestowed; for if we cannot dislike the price, which is to bring "neither money nor price," you must then dislike the wares, which are heaven with holiness. And how great a scorn do we then put upon the Lord Jesus, the purchaser of free grace! It was Christ's payment that made all free to us. Who can excuse the contempt of such both love and cost at once? There is no liquor that scalds so tormentingly in hell, as the oil of mercy. Grace turned into fury is the most killing enemy. Freeness invites all worldly customers. Who loveth not costly things that cost him nothing? Who shunneth an interest in a thousand pounds a year, to be had for taking up at the court? And why alone, my brethren, should Jesus Christ want customers? Are there any commodities so rich as his? Are there any commodities to us so cheap as his? Why should they alone be slow that go to take the favour and love of God through him? especially considering, that they have paid so dear for "that which is not bread," yea, for that which is their bane. Free grace tendered and neglected is condemnation heightened. You cannot have the favour of God by doing; what, will you not have it for receiving neither? You will not then have it at all. It is that hell of hells, that free grace is despised, hath been neglected!

Thus much for the first branch of the second argument: the season of grace is a time of acceptance, and therefore in respect of that advantage it requires our present improving thereof.

## SECTION XVI.

2. For the second branch of this second argument: *The season of grace is also called the day of salvation*.—But why doth this second

\* In the first edition, the sentence is: "You cannot dig: by doing you are lost, if you are ashamed to beg at the door, or rather for the dole, of free grace in this thy day."—EDIT.

branch put us upon the present improving of the season of grace? For answer, take these considerations:—

(1.) *It is a day of salvation; and salvation is a work that must be regarded: it is a matter of absolute necessity.*—Other things are *may-be's*, at the best, matters of mere conveniency; but salvation is a business of peremptory and indispensable necessity. A fair day is convenient to ride in; but the journey itself being of life and death is absolutely necessary. You may be excused at the day of judgment for leaving any thing in the world undone beside the getting of salvation. You may be excused, if you never had time to get the riches or honours of the world, or great endowments or employments. But what shall excuse you, if you have not looked after eternal life? Can you say, “We had another employment more, or as, necessary?” Can you say, “We were taken up about something more needful, more useful?” No, you cannot. Now remember, that which must be done should be most done and first done. First attend [to] necessities, and then look after circumstantials: “first seek the kingdom of God.” Here it is no measuring cast whether you should obtain salvation: it is a *must be*. *Tempus perdimus dum aternitatem non quærimus*: “You lose all that time that is not spent in looking after a happy eternity.” First get bread for thy starving children; and then, if thou hast time, look after rattles for them. A work of necessity must not be put off to a time of uncertainty. If thou delayest, delay in looking after riches and honour, and the vanities of the world: O, but *now, now, now* pursue salvation! It is a *must-be*; and if the present time be gone, you may be undone for ever.

(2.) *Salvation is that which imports rest and satisfaction.*—Salvation! it is the soul's quietation and ease. Heaven is that centre of the soul: you are never at rest till you come there. Now the object of rest is speedily to be pursued. How doth every thing hasten to its rest, its centre! How doth the stone with eagerness hasten to the earth, when thrown from the top of a high steeple! How swiftly doth the fire fly upwards to its rest, to its centre! With what a rapid motion, with what a fierce career, do the rivers run into the sea! They are going to their place, the place of waters. Is heaven thy rest? Is heaven thy centre? Why is thy tendency to it so sluggish? You owe unto life eternal all those propensions and all those inclinations, wherewith all the things of the world are carried to the centres. The speed that the wicked make in getting to hell, proclaims that hell is their proper place and centre, though not for rest, but restlessness. Shall every thing hasten to rest, but thy soul? It was the speech of Naomi to her daughter: “My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee?” (Ruth iii. 1.) O that every one would say unto his soul, “My soul, shall I not look after rest for thee in the bosom of God, and the eternal fruition of himself?” The little infant that cries for sleep will rise up in judgment against a sinner that doth not look after the rest of his soul. That little infant that cries for sleep out-goeth thee in wisdom.

(3.) *It is a day of salvation; and the pursuing of salvation is opus grande, “a great work,” a vast employment.*—Many things are required

to accomplish it; many lusts to be subdued, many duties to be discharged, many temptations to be resisted, many relations to be filled. Now a great work must be begun betimes. If you had but a little to do in the day, you might lie in bed a great while in the morning. But you have a vast work to do; and therefore get up early. Some poor creatures will rise up early to washing; a pitiful work to the cleansing of thy soul; a far greater work surely than to wash clothes! If you had a thousand souls, they might all be employed for the obtaining of salvation. If every finger were a hand, they might all be employed in getting of salvation. He that hath many children to look after and a small estate, many to feed and clothe,—he saith, “I must rise early and sit up late.” None have so much business as a Christian. The work of Christianity is never at an end. The art of religion is never learned. There is still an *et cetera*; still something remaining to be done. Blessed Paul thought himself far from perfection: “I do not look upon myself as having attained.” The best have much more to be done, than they have already done. I have read of a famous limner, who when he had wrought his picture in the best and most curious manner, would never write at the bottom, *Feci*, but, *Faciebam*; “I did it,” not, “I have done it;” because he judged he had never wrought any picture so well, but he might work it better, and add something more of art to it. A Christian’s art is never complete while he liveth in this world, nor ever did a saint think himself a complete artist. How exceeding large are the commands of God! How little is our most, and how bad is our best, compared with the rule!

(4.) *This delaying in the pursuit of salvation is a delaying to be freed from the greatest evil.*—What is that? The wrath of God, guilt, damnation, hell. Delaying to be freed from extreme miseries is con-  
futed by constant experience. What condemned malefactor will delay to get free from his chains, from his dungeon, from the sentence of death? What tormented person upon the rack will say, “I must consider before I accept of ease?” And when ease and riddance from the rack are offered, if instantly he will accept thereof, will say, “I will consider of it, I will give answer of it hereafter?” If a dust fly into the eye, thou hastest to get it out: and wilt thou not haste to ease thy soul? Who ever deliberated, whether he would come out of the fire or no? It is more mad to deliberate whether thou wilt be saved or no, and get out of the state of damnation. Here is no place for deliberation; it is no measuring cast.

(5.) *Salvation,—it is our own concern; it is opus proprium, “our own business,” it is not another’s.*—It may be, a slothful apprentice will be backward to rise in the morning, when he is to do his master’s business; but when he sets-up for himself, and is to gather an estate for himself, he will go about his business speedily. Salvation is a work for yourselves; the gain thereof is your own gain. Whatever you get here goes into your own purse. Here, “if you are wise, you are wise for yourselves.” (Prov. ix. 12.) O that we had more true self-love! The common self-love in the world is employed about our bodily self, the shell, the sheath of the true self, which is the body. Few men truly love their true self:

it is a common proverb, "Interest will not lie;" yet the soul that delays salvation,—his interest lies; he walks contrary to it, and neglects that wherein all his blessedness doth consist, makes orts\* of his own salvation.

(6.) *It is a day of salvation; and salvation recompenses for all earliness and earnestness.*—Salvation maketh amends for all the sufferings and services of time. How poor, how short and slight, is our work, compared with our wages! If there could be any trouble in heaven, it would be this,—that we have laboured for it no more and no sooner upon earth. Thou hast no more to live-on to eternity, than what thou layest up here. As our obedience is small, compared with our *rule prescribed*; so it is very small compared with our *recompence promised*. Though nothing can recompense for the neglect of salvation; yet salvation can recompense for the neglecting of all other things. Nor only doth it recompense for our neglecting of all things, but for our being neglected of all persons, and for all our reproaches for our early pursuing it: all which will easily be confuted with this answer: It is better to be reproached and derided for being too speedy, than damned for being too slow, in entering into heaven's way. It is more easy to bear the scorns of the world, than the scourges of conscience. I conclude: We can never regard salvation too soon; for we can never either enjoy it, or think we can enjoy it, too long.

\* See note in page 681.—EDIT.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

