

according to the rules of the Christian religion, which did strike such an awe into them of the majesty of their religion, which did shine forth in their holy, heavenly conversation, as brought their enemies under so great convictions, as they durst not at that present attempt them, or hinder their peace. A saint sanctifies the name of the Lord in the course of his life, while he walks in the fear of the Lord. (Isai. viii. 13.) This was a great argument which prevailed with Nehemiah; and he propounded it to the people: "To walk in the fear of the Lord, because of the reproach of the enemy." (Neh. v. 9.) It is not the Jew who denieth the name of Christ, or the Turk who defieth it, or the Pagan dragon who persecuteth the name of Christ, (Rev. xii. 2—4,) that casts so foul a blot and reproach upon the name of Christ, as he who takes upon him the name of Christ, and under a form of godliness lives in the practice of those foul abominations spoken of, 2 Tim. iii. 1—5; from which "turn away."

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## SERMON XXIV.

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HOW WE MAY STEER AN EVEN COURSE BETWEEN PRESUMPTION  
AND DESPAIR.

*As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth.—Luke iii. 4, 5.*

THIS chapter begins with the ministry of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ: in which you have,

1. *The time of his ministry*, when it began, set down and ascertained by some particular and very memorable remarks upon it, from the names of those who were then in authority, chief governors and rulers both in church and state, whose several offices and commands bore the same date with John's preaching. (Verses 1, 2.) The reason of this I shall not now trouble you with.

2. *His call unto this office*.—Verse 2: "The word of God came unto John."

3. *The subject-matter of his preaching*.—Namely, "The baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." (Verse 3.)

4. *The occasion that prompted him to this subject, and made him fix his thoughts upon it*.—Which was an ancient prophecy out of Isaiah, chap. xl. 3; the Holy Ghost bringing this into his mind, telling him it was now to be fulfilled by his preaching, and therefore no doubt directed

him to pitch upon such a subject as might tend most to the accomplishment of that prophecy.

The prophecy or promise (for it is both) you have in the words of my text, and in the last clause of the succeeding verse.

I shall not insist upon the several metaphors in the text, but in short give you the general sense of the whole.

By "mountains and valleys" I understand all sorts of men, high and low, rich and poor; who, considered in their natural condition, whether convinced or unconvinced, do all stand in a direct opposition to Jesus Christ, are exceeding averse from, and unprepared for, the doctrine of the gospel, will not submit to the law of faith, some upon one account, and some upon another, till God by a further work of the Spirit doth open their eyes, and draw their hearts to Christ. Now the words of the text do contain this preparatory work of the gospel upon poor sinners, in order to due reception of Christ, and a right application of him by faith unto the soul. It consists of two parts: 1. Pulling-down mountains: 2. Filling-up valleys; both very difficult work. John had to do with some who were puffed-up with a conceit of their own righteousness, and would be their own saviours, and not be beholden to Christ and free grace for any thing, thinking themselves to be something, when indeed they were nothing. (Gal. vi. 3; Rev. iii. 16, 17.) These were the proud Pharisees, boasting of their own righteousness; and beside these there are also a company of profane, atheistical Sadducees, who gloried in their sins, and, denying the resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul, ran out into all licentiousness.

Others again were so convinced of sin and of the dangerous consequence of it, that they were ready to sink into despair, knew not what to do, fearing their sins were greater than could be forgiven. These are the "mountains and valleys" in the text. Presumption on the one hand, and despair on the other, *that* rises too high, *this* sinks too low; *that* inclines too much one way, *this* too much the other; and there is a crookedness and obliquity in both, which must be rectified and straightened by the preaching of repentance in order to the remission of sins. This John doth; First, urging the necessity of repentance upon the proud Pharisees, who thought they needed no repentance; (Luke xv. 7;) Secondly, urging the great gospel-privilege that Christ hath purchased for believers upon their repentance, namely, remission of sins, upon poor dejected sinners; that both the one and the other might see the right way of salvation by Jesus Christ: for though the light of nature, by which we are convinced of the equity and righteousness of the moral law, do bind us to repentance when we act against it, yet it cannot promise that we shall get any thing by our repentance, being altogether ignorant of the mystery of the gospel. Thus we see the mountains must be brought low, and the valleys filled up, and both reduced to such an exact level, evenness, and plainness, that Christ may sit close upon the soul without the least interposition of any thing between him and us, or the least remaining vacuity or emptiness in ourselves, into which his fulness doth not descend, making-up whatsoever is wanting in us; and when it is so, there is a thorough, perfect closure with Christ in the greatest nearness, in the strictest and most intimate union that can be.

But you will say, "How shall we come to this? How shall we walk thus between the mountain and the valley in a straight, direct line of faith and hope to Jesus Christ?" Which brings me to the case or QUESTION now to be spoken to from the text, which is this, namely, *How may we steer an even course between presumption and despair?*

The true state of this question depends upon a clear discovery of the real difference that is between the grace of hope and both these extremes, —presumption and despair. Therefore,

I. *I shall distinguish between presumption and hope.*—The difference between hope and despair is more apparent; but we are too, too apt to confound presumption and hope, there being a greater affinity between these than the other. As in morality some virtues come nearer to one extreme than to the other; so here, there is something of the general nature of hope in presumption. *Præsumptio non excludit spem, sed rectitudinem spei.*\* Therefore we must be the more accurate and strict in distinguishing between the grace of hope, and the sin of presumption, which, *fallente quâdam specie*,† resembles the grace of hope; and those who are guilty of this sin do always put the specious name of hope upon it. They are not sensible of any presumption, as others are of despair; and therefore their case is more dangerous: *Ed magis desperati quod minus desperantes*; ‡ and where one despairs, thousands do presume.

Before I come to particulars, I must distinguish of a double presumption: 1. *Of ourselves and our own merits.* 2. *Of God and his mercy.* Both stand in a direct opposition to the true grace of hope; and I shall show you where the difference lies. I begin with,

1. *The first sort of presumption: which is of ourselves.*—This is a proud, arrogant presumption, arising from a vain conceit of our own supposed worth and righteousness. We think to stand upon our own legs, insisting not upon what Christ is to us or hath done for us, but upon what we are in and to ourselves, and have done for Christ: "We have prophesied in thy name," &c. (Matt. vii. 22.) "We are not as this publican; we have done thus and thus, and ought to be considered for our good works; and we doubt not but we shall." It is not the promises of free-grace, but the law and their strict observance of that, which these men ground their hope upon. But the true grace of hope is always grounded upon faith in the promises, and is all along fed, nourished, maintained, and strengthened by those believing persuasions that it hath of the truth of those promises which at first produced and begat this hope in the soul: and in the continual exercise of this grace, in its daily actings, it eyes the promises, hath daily recourse to them for its further confirmation; it is bottomed upon them, takes its rise from thence, and bears up the soul upon the credit of them. (Rom. xv. 4; Psalm cxix. 74.) This is "the hope of the gospel," (Col. i. 23,) that carries us out of ourselves. A Christian's hope is hope in another, and not in himself. The right notion of hope, as it is an evangelical grace, implies our sole dependence upon God, as the only author and fountain of all that good which we desire and look for; which doth sufficiently

\* ZANCHIUS. "Presumption does not exclude hope, but the uprightness of hope."—EDIT. † AQUINAS. "By a certain deceitful appearance."—EDIT. ‡ AMESIUS *De Conscientiâ*. "The less they despair, the more desperate is their condition."—EDIT.

difference it from that false hope or self-presumption that I have been speaking of, and which was principally aimed at by John in the text, being a presumption more peculiar to those times and persons here spoken of, who lived under the law, and were much in doing, but understood not the end of their moral or ceremonial works, but trusted in them, and made saviours of them; and at the first entrance of the gospel they opposed the doctrine of free grace, would hear neither John nor Christ himself, but "rejected the counsel of God against themselves." (Luke vii. 30, 33, 34.) See what a character Paul gives of them, and of all others throughout the world who should entertain the least thought of salvation out of Christ: "Destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known." (Rom. iii. 16, 17.) This one scripture, if well weighed, is enough to shake the confidence of the most presumptuous self-justiciary that is, and to convince him and all the world of their need of Christ. In Psalm xiv., which Paul quotes in this chapter, God is brought-in taking a strict survey of mankind, before he sent his Son into the world, to see if there were any that stood in no need of him; as if he had said, "If there be any such, let him come forth and show himself." David answers for himself, verse 7: "Not I, Lord, not I, Lord; I wait for Christ, I long for Christ. 'O that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!' O that Christ were come! that the free grace and mercy of God were more clearly revealed! Then 'Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad;' this will be good news indeed." So Jer. xvii. 5—7. The result of all is this: true hope eyes God in Christ, and argues from him; this presumption now spoken of eyes self, and argues from thence in all its actings.

2. *The second sort of presumption to be distinguished from hope is that by which we presume upon God and his mercy.*—This is grown-up since the preaching of the gospel: there is, indeed, too great a spice of the former presumption among professors; and as that wears off, this succeeds; nay, they unhappily mingle together. If legal presumption cannot altogether shut-out conviction, yet it minces the matter: "It is a little one, and my soul shall live;" and so makes way for this credulous presumption, that brings-in a salvo for all presently: "God is gracious, mercy is promised, Christ has died for sinners, and all will be well; we shall go to heaven of course without any more ado;" and so they sit down in security all their days, till they are surprised with their everlasting doom unawares. This is *infidelis fiducia*,\* "a faithless confidence, a fond, credulous presumption," arising from a groundless, over-easy persuasion of the mercy of God toward us. This kind of presumption may be joined with some sense and conviction of sin and the dangerous consequence of it, but presently salves all with the general air and breath of a promise misconstrued and misapplied. The mistakes are these:—

(1.) *This is more fancy than faith or hope.*—It is a vain imagination that deludes men into a belief and expectation of that which they are in no likelihood of, in no capacity for: they promise themselves what God hath never promised, "cry, Peace, peace, when God hath not spoken peace."

\* BERNARDUS.

(2.) *Such an one doth not rightly distinguish between the workings of natural affection toward any good propounded, and the rational actings of hope for the obtaining of it in a probable or certain way, in the use of due and proper means.*—Heaven, glory, and eternal life, are good words and better things: at the first mention of them, we naturally desire them, and wish for them. But shall we be carried away with a mere sound of words? Must we needs have all we hear of? We shall quickly bring ourselves into a fools' Paradise this way, dreaming we eat, and yet awake an hungry. There is more ado than so to inherit the promises: we must prove our title first: the promises give us an interest in heaven, but it is Christ that gives us an interest in the promises. He opens the mouth of a promise to speak comfort to us; in him they "are all yea and amen," but out of him they all cry, "No, no; we have nothing for you who are out of Christ." They will deny all the world that come not in his name, and never let out any thing of their treasure to such; no wringing-out of one drop of solid comfort. The bare history or outward relation of the mercy of God in the letter of the word, gives us no interest in the things promised: the carnal Jews, as Paul observes, had the promises, and boasted of them, but got little by them. Christ is the Door of every promise: let us not think to make a forcible entry, to climb up at the windows, like thieves, to steal out mercy, as if we cared not how we came by it. You will find, what is so gotten will thrive accordingly, and quickly come to nothing. What I drive at is this: it is not the report of the worth or amiableness of a thing, but an apprehension of the possibility of it as to us, that causes hope: till we are clear in this, our hope cannot act rationally. If it have no other ground beside our own desires and natural inclinations, raised and kindled in us by the specious appearance and ravishing beauty of some taking objects, this argues rather what we would have, than any likelihood of [the] obtaining of our wishes, which is of the very essence of hope. Earnest desires are very apt to run-out into a forward, presuming hope, we know not well why or wherefore. *Quæ volumus facile credimus.\**

(3.) Another mistake in this fond, credulous presumption is, that it *takes-up promises in its own sense, and not in the true sense and meaning of God.*—So the Jews cried, they were "Abraham's seed," &c.; (John viii. 33;) and the promise ran in these very words, "To Abraham and his seed:" therefore, who but they must be included in it? But it was the spiritual seed that God meant, not that after the flesh: "They are not all Israel, which are of Israel." (Rom. ix. 6.) "No," says Christ; "you are the children of the devil, 'of your father the devil.'" (John viii. 44.) And "they took up stones, and threw at him," (verse 59,) being not able to bear any contradiction to their false hopes. So, when we read those promises of salvation to those that come to Christ, believe in him, call upon his name, we must not understand them as if a bare form of godliness, and crying, "Lord, have mercy upon us," would bring us to heaven. No, my brethren; the mystery of religion lies deeper than so. It is the labour of the heart that requires the greatest diligence, intension, and seriousness imaginable, strong workings within,

\* "We give ready credence to that which we desire."—EDIT.

great agonies and contentions of spirit, in our dealings with God in any duty. The life of our worship does consist in these inward spiritual motions of the soul toward God: this is that coming, that believing, that praying, to which salvation is promised. The grace of hope inquires after the secrets of the covenant, the real intent and mind of God in every promise; prays for a right understanding of all particulars: "Open mine eyes, that I may see the wonders of thy law." (Psalm cxix. 18.)

Beside the true meaning of a promise, a child of God is very solicitous to know whether God do indeed mean *him*, and speak to *him*, and offer those pearls to *him*; whether *he* be a person rightly qualified, and under all those due circumstances that belong to persons entertaining such a hope. It is a great comfort and satisfaction to a believer, when God does own his hope, and encourage him in it, by some sensible demonstrations of his undoubted interest in such and such promises. He hears God say to him, "Take, eat; this is thy portion, purchased by Christ for thee. Thou art my child; and this is children's bread; it belongeth to thee. While we are musing and praying over a promise, God does sometimes feed us out of that promise himself, and with his own hand puts many a sweet morsel into our mouths. O, this is overcoming kindness! this is a double, a treble welcome, to have such fare, and the master of the feast standing by, and looking on, and carving to us himself, and crying out, as it is, Canticles v. 1: "Eat, O my friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." When we have shut our Bibles, and have done with a promise, and are setting-down the cup of salvation out of our hands, God many times makes us to mend our draught, and go deeper than ever we did: "Drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." But presumption is a bold guest, thrusts-in uninvited, catches at this and that in a rude manner. The word "presumption" notes a "taking beforehand," before it is offered, before it is due. Before he is called, he runs away with a promise, puts his own sense upon it, and deludes himself with vain hopes from it; and, when the King comes to review his guests, shall be "cast out into outer darkness." (Matt. xxii. 11—13.)

(4.) Another error or mistake in presumption is, that *it picks and chooses out some promises, and rejects others.*—The privileges of the saints it catcheth at, freedom from condemnation, eternal life and glory; but the promises of grace, sanctification, and holiness, it minds not. It hopes to see God without holiness, and to go to heaven as well as the best; it is more for the wages than for the work. But the grace of hope fastens upon every promise, gathers honey out of every flower, is as earnest for grace as for glory: "Thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling," &c., and "refrain them from every evil way?" (Psalm lvi. 13; cxix. 101.) "Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments." (Psalm cxix. 166.) But presumption makes men more remiss and careless in their whole course: it does not quicken our endeavours, and make us more active for God; as hope does, by which we purify ourselves. (1 John iii. 3.) It [hope] puts us upon preparing ourselves for the actual possession of what we hope for, that we may be meet for the kingdom of God, and ready to

enter-in with the Bridegroom : it uses all means to attain its end. If thy hope be not a heart-purifying hope, a life-reforming hope, it is no better than presumption. (1 Peter i. 13 ; Psalm xxxvii. 3.)

(5.) *Those things that presumption counts upon in a careless way, it doth not bring them so close to the soul.*—It doth not give us that lively taste and sense of them as true hope does : they do not work so kindly upon the heart. Presumption apprehends something in gross, in a confused manner, pleasing itself with the names and empty notions of things rather than with the things themselves ; is contented with a negative happiness ; and understands no more by going to heaven and being saved, than that he shall not be damned, and be tormented in hell. A presumptuous person knows not what heaven is, what the blessedness of the saints is ; he studies not those things ; but at all adventures he would exchange hell for heaven, and pleaseth himself with an imaginary happiness. Presumption never makes men heavenly-minded ; for all their high words and confident boastings, yet they are not in earnest for heaven ; they do not savour these things. Something they must say, something they must pretend to, to silence their consciences, and to keep down those fears that otherwise would distract them. There may be an affectation of heaven, where there is no true affection for it. Heaven, glory, and eternal life are gay things, and signify some great good, but *what* they know not. But hope brings things home to the heart : we see the substance of what we hope for. (Heb. xi. 1.) Faith comments upon our hope, discourses of the excellent nature of those things we wait for, tells us many pleasing stories of heaven and Christ and the glory that is above. This mightily heightens hope, ravishes the soul, makes it even leap for joy, that its reward shall be so great in heaven. Faith lifts us up within the veil, gives us a strong taste of the powers of the world to come ; and so feeds and nourishes hope, encourages it to a patient waiting for that which will quit cost at last, and fully answer our expectations.

(6.) *Presumption, as it neglects the use of all means for the attaining its end, (as I said before,) so it is signally guilty of the neglect of prayer.* (Psalm x. 4.)—It is the presumptuous sinner, blessing himself in his wickedness, [whom] David there speaks of. (Verse 3.) But true hope is full of holy breathings and longings after that which it hopes for.\* (Rom. viii. 23 ; 2 Cor. v. 2.) That hope may well be suspected, that puts us not upon frequent and earnest prayer : they have little ground for their hope of salvation, *who* call not upon the Lord. (Rom. x. 13.) If thy hope be not a praying hope, it is a presuming hope.

(7.) *Presumption, though it talk much of Christ, as one who must do all for us, and will save us, yet such an one studies not the mystery of Christ, doth not make it his business to search the scripture, to inquire after him, to satisfy himself about him, that he is able to save.*—Herein appears the unreasonableness of this sin,—we trust we know not whom : for a man to commit his greatest concern to an unknown hand, and to rest secure, is very unreasonableness. But true hope is well acquainted with Christ,

\* *Omne desiderium post spem impatientius.* “After the indulgence of hope, every desire is the more impatient.”—EUIT.

much in the studies of the mystery of Christ, having reposed so great a trust in him, is very desirous to know him thoroughly, and can never act with confidence till then. "I know," saith Paul, "whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him." (2 Tim. i. 12.) "I dare trust him; he will not fail me." The reason of our hope must be fetched from somewhat in Christ, rendering him sufficient for the work he hath undertaken; else it is unreasonable, nay, it must needs sink and die. "Without Christ, without hope." (Eph. ii. 12.) When God sent Christ into the world to save us, what a high character doth he give of him, purposely to encourage us to trust in him!—"I have laid help upon one that is mighty," (Psalm lxxxix. 19,) "able to save to the uttermost," (Heb. vii. 25,) "mighty to save." (Isai. xlix. 26; lxiii. 1.) Take all the promises of the gospel, nay, all the contents of the Bible, and consider them apart by themselves, not in conjunction with God, nor in relation to him, who is the Author and Owner of them, and the great Undertaker of all things mentioned therein; we shall have little ground to believe them. But "in God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust." (Psalm lvi. 4.) Christ in us is our "hope of glory." (Col. i. 27.) How glad is a believer to hear any thing of the fulness, power, and excellency of Christ! O, his heart leaps within: "This is my God, my Saviour, my Redeemer: what a happy man am I!" (Psalm cxliv. 15.) "This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem!" (Canticles v. 16.) A believer is very proud of Christ, if I may so speak: this enlivens hope, and raises it to a very high pitch. If our thoughts of Christ, and love to him, be not raised and heightened by our hope in him, it is not right. There is nothing more common in the mouths of the ignorant, profane sort than to say, "I hope to be saved by Jesus Christ." But whoever thou art that sayest so of course, not minding what thou sayest, take up those words again, and make common sense of them, if thou canst, to thy own understanding. What! hope to be saved by Christ, whom thou knowest not, hast no acquaintance with, art a mere stranger to! O, lay aside those strange hopes, till thou hast learned Christ; let me enjoin thee never to utter those words more, till thou knowest Christ better. How possible thy salvation may be, I will not now dispute; but I am sure, thy present hopes of it are very unreasonable and groundless.

II. Thus having showed the difference between presumption and hope, I shall in the next place speak something, but more briefly, of *the difference between despair and hope*. As I did before distinguish of a double presumption, so I must in the same terms distinguish of a double despair:—

Despair is either, 1. *Of ourselves*.—Which is an humble, holy, despair, very consistent with hope, and a necessary preparation and introduction to it, a valley never to be filled-up. The gospel doth by no means allow of self-exaltation. "No flesh" must "glory in his presence." (1 Cor. i. 29.) We must still seem vile in our own eyes.

2. *Of God and of his mercy*.—Which is two-fold.

(1.) *Privative*.—Which is a total privation of the habit, root, or principle of true saving hope, as in all unbelievers.



(2.) *Negative*.—A cessation of the acts of hope, which is two-fold. (i.) *A total* cessation, at least as to our sense and discerning, of the actings of hope for a time: this is *temporary despair*. (ii.) *Gradual*, arising from a weakness in the actings of hope; which is *despair in opinion*, counted so by weak, doubting Christians. Both these last-mentioned are incident to true believers, and occasion much sorrow and sadness to them.

But this privation or negation of hope doth not fully set forth the nature of despair; in which there seems to be somewhat positive, *recessus a re desiderata*,\* as the Schools speak, an actual withdrawing from Christ. The heart falls off from the promises, doth act against them, puts them from us: despair argues and reasons the soul out of its hope, puts-in a caveat against itself, cannot think that a person under such circumstances can be within the meaning of the promise, and so sinks and faints away. (Job xvii. 15.) This is more than mere privation or negation; there is an evil disposition wrought in the heart by unbelief, which fills the soul with many prejudices against the truth, makes it pertinaciously to adhere unto its own erroneous judgment, so that it can do nothing now but quarrel, dispute, and except against all that may be said on the other side. These things premised, I now come to show the difference between despair and hope.

1. *Despair* is the result of strong legal convictions, urging the sentence of the law against us, without any consideration of gospel-grace for our relief and succour. This works great consternation, fills the soul with amazing fears, shuts it up in a dark dungeon, claps it in irons, binds it hand and foot, and so leaves it under a fearful expectation of fiery indignation to devour it. But *hope* deals in the promises, is begotten by them, and bears up the soul under the condemnation of the law.

2. *Despair* indisposes the soul from hearkening to the free grace of the gospel, when it is offered, because it still retains those strong impressions and dreadful apprehensions which the law hath wrought, and will not be comforted. But *hope* allays these fears, makes the soul willing to debate the matter, to hear what the gospel says, to see what may be done in so dangerous a cause.

3. *Despair* sees more in sin than in Christ, and supposes the wound incurable: "My sin is greater than can be forgiven." But *hope* sees grace superabounding, large enough to cover all our sins.

4. *Despair* is very peremptory and positive in concluding against itself; it is resolved upon nothing but death: "Greater than can be forgiven, a lost undone creature to all eternity; it cannot be otherwise." As in the highest degree of faith and hope there is assurance of salvation, so here there is a dismal, uncomfortable assurance of damnation. But *hope*, though it may be accompanied with many fears and doubts, yet there is some expectation of good, a patient looking for and solicitous waiting, though sometimes with trembling, for salvation. The soul doth not give over its pursuit after life and pardon, but, when it is at the lowest ebb, doth apprehend some possibility of escape through Christ: "It may be, for all this, we shall be hid in the day

\* "A receding from the thing desired."—EDIT.

of the Lord's anger;' (Zeph. ii. 3;) 'it may be we shall be delivered from 'the wrath to come.''' Thus hope draws-on the soul to Christ, encouraging it to come forward.

### III. DIRECTIONS HOW TO AVOID BOTH EXTREMES.

FIRST. *Against presumption, whether of ourselves, or of God.*

1. *Against that presumption that is of ourselves, take these following directions:—*

(1.) *Take up so much of a sense of sin into the mount of hope as may keep thy hope from swelling into presumption, or from feeding upon any thing in thyself.*

(2.) *Be much in proving thy hope, in giving thyself and others a reason of it.* (1 Peter iii. 15.)—This is the way to keep it right: consider what that reason is, whether it be a true gospel-ground of hope. As natural affections in a man must be guided by reason, so spiritual affections in a Christian must be regulated and influenced by faith: "I believed, and therefore have I spoken;" (2 Cor. iv. 13;) so it holds here: "I believe, and therefore do I hope."

(3.) *Suspect those acts of hope that have their rise from any thing else but Christ and the promises.*—The heart of man is deep and very deceitful: it is no easy matter to understand our hope at all times, and to manage it aright. We are apt to forget ourselves: flesh will be putting-in and contributing something from itself toward the support of our hope; it will be casting-in something into the scale with Christ, to make better weight. This we must carefully watch against, keeping our eye only upon Christ; as David, Psalm lxii. 5, 6. When we find our hearts pleasing themselves with any self-reflections upon our own personal worth in any kind, we should fear lest those thoughts should gather too fast, and puff us up in a vain conceit of ourselves. We should see nothing but meanness, vileness, and unworthiness in ourselves, under the highest actings of our hope in Christ: "Though I were perfect, yet would I not know my soul." (Job ix. 21.)

(4.) *Begin thy hope with an act of humble, holy despair of thyself.*—That thy hope may be discharged on that hand, forced to quit all expectations from thence, and not be tempted to any sinister aspect that way, upon so poor, empty, insufficient a thing as thou knowest thyself to be. "We know not what to do, but our eyes are upon thee." (2 Chron. xx. 12.) Our hope, though it look never so directly upon Christ, yet it is too, too apt to take-in some collateral encouragements from self, which do cause a further dilation in the heart, and make some secret, and, if we observe our own spirit, some sensible, additions to the joy and complacency [that] we have in our hope. We bless ourselves the more; and though we are pleased with Christ, yet we are pleased with something beside Christ: and this spoils all, it poisons our hope, is like a canker, eats like a gangrene, and is a great blemish to our hope.

(5.) If all this will not do, but still thy proud heart is big with expectation of something from God upon its own account, and thou canst not separate self from Christ in the out-goings of thy hope; then my advice is, *Answer thy foolish heart for once in its folly,*

*and take its supposed worth into thy serious consideration.*—Weigh it well, prove it, examine all its pretences, that the truth may appear: and that you may do this, consider yourselves out of Christ; it is necessary for believers to do so sometimes. I do not say, you should put-off Christ; that must never be done; but it may be convenient, as the case stands, to let the wedding-garment hang loose about you, that you may see your own poverty and nakedness; and then cover all again, and admire the free grace of God, who hath provided thee a better righteousness than any [which] thou canst see in thyself, to trust in, and to ground thy hope upon. This is the way to correct the exorbitancy of thy immoderate hope, and to keep it within its proper sphere. We never have more lively, heart-ravishing thoughts and apprehensions of free grace, than after fresh and warm apprehensions of our own vileness and wretchedness by nature. Eph. ii. 3: “By nature the children of wrath;” and then he breaks out into a great admiration of the mercy of God. (Verse 4.)

2. Directions *against that kind of presumption that is of God and his mercy*, which I called “a fond, credulous presumption:”—

(1.) *Study the doctrine of election.*—That tells us, that God is the sovereign Lord of the whole world, hath put a vast distinction between man and man;—there are some that he hates, as well as some that he loves; of the same lump of clay, some made vessels unto honour, and some unto dishonour; some “vessels of wrath fitted to destruction,” some “vessels of mercy prepared unto glory;” (Rom. ix. 20—23;) that God is a free, voluntary agent, not necessarily bound to choose thee or me rather than others; no: “He hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.” (Verse 18.) Whence is it, then, that men are so confident of the favour of God? You may be in the number of the many that are called, and yet not in the number of those few that are chosen, for all your confidence. Hath electing, redeeming Love set any peculiar mark upon thee, by which thou mayest be known and distinguished from the reprobate world at the last day? If not, it is strange presumption in thee to nourish such vain hopes.

(2.) *Consider the strict limitations and provisoes of the covenant of grace.*—By which all obstinate, impenitent sinners, remaining such, are shut out from mercy. And art not thou such an one? Examine thyself; hath grace taught thee to deny ungodliness? Till then, it will never save thee.

(3.) *Consider the difficulty of salvation.*—It is not so easy a matter to get to heaven as you imagine: “Narrow is the way, strait is the gate, and few there be that find it.” “The righteous are scarcely saved.” (1 Peter iv. 18.) Things that are arduous and difficult are not easily swallowed, will not in reason admit of a rash, credulous hope, but call for serious counsel and debate. There are in such cases many agitations in the mind, *accessus et recessus*; (AQUINAS;) the soul “goes and comes, backward and forward,” off and on, cannot presently fix and settle itself in an even, steadfast, constant hope. Most Christians do pass through such fluctuations and perplexities to a quiet, comfortable hope of salvation.

(4.) Consider this also: *Have the promises [which] thou boastest so*

*much of, begot fear in thee, as well as hope?*—A Christian's hope is a heedful, careful, solicitous hope. (2 Cor. vii. 1; Heb. iv. 1.) Hope without fear is presumption.

(5.) *Let thy hope be grounded upon some inward experience of the mighty saving power of Christ, put forth upon thy soul.*—"Experience worketh hope." (Rom. v. 4.) "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it." (Phil. i. 6.) "To him that hath, shall be given." (Matt. xiii. 12.) What pledges, then, of divine favour, what love-tokens hast thou by thee? What taste and sight of the goodness and grace of God? We hope for the complement and perfection of that which in some measure we have already attained. When we see God pursuing us with his kindness in any particular expression of his love, this begets hope that we shall have all at last,—those greater things that are promised. God's end, in bestowing lesser mercies upon us, is to quicken and strengthen our hope of greater: it is strange presumption for persons who never received the least token of special grace from God, to expect such great things as heaven and glory. God gives many things before he gives heaven; do not think at first dash to have heaven; there are many preparatory mercies always antecedent to that. The saints are "compassed about with mercy and songs of deliverance;" (Psalm xxxii. 7, 10;) and from those experiences they argue as David did, 1 Sam. xvii. 37: "He will do this and that for us, and not destroy us, after he hath done us so much good." But if thou hast nothing to show as a convincing evidence of God's love and good-will to thee, it looks too much like presumption, to hope for pounds, for the whole sum, before we have received the earnest-penny. Hope is not the first work of the Spirit upon the heart; it is a secondary grace, the natural result of faith, which gives very satisfactory intimations of God's love to us, and so begets hope in us. Consult, therefore, the experiences of God's goodness to you in some measure, before you soar too high in the actings of your hope.

SECONDLY. *Directions against despair.*

1. *To those in Christ who are sometimes liable to these fainting-fits, and find their hope shaken, are to seek of it.*—Being suddenly struck with an amazing sight and sense of sin and wrath, they conclude their case desperate, and cry out as Job did, chap. xiv. 19—22. The devil hath two ways or methods by which he seeks to undermine and overthrow the hope of a Christian. I shall discover both to you, and endeavour to secure you against both.

(1.) *If thy hope be strong and lively, he will slander it with the name of "presumption."*—That he may shake thy confidence, and discourage thee from those eminent actings of thy hope wherein thou hast had so much comfort. He does envy thy happiness: he would fain clip the wings of thy faith and hope, that he may rob thee of the joy of thy salvation, and keep thee at a low ebb all thy days: he would take off thy helmet, that he may knock thee down at one blow. Groundless fears of presumption do exceedingly balk and check our hope, bring it into suspense, which is negative despair. In such conflicts and fierce assaults, gird-up thyself, stand fast, and hope to the

end, hold fast thy confidence; and that you may do this, call in thy faith to maintain and justify thy hope, as rightly grounded upon gospel-promises, and consequently capable of no excess. Let it run in the right channel never so swiftly, and rise never so high, it is so much the better; true grace is not confined to such a scantling or degree; it can never be overgrown, its beauty and comeliness do increase with its stature; the greater, the larger, the fuller, the higher it is, the more conspicuous and glorious. Hence are those commendations of grace, where it is in any eminency: "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." (Matt. viii. 10.) "O woman, great is thy faith." (Matt. xv. 28.) The scriptures do exhort us to grow in every grace. Let "these things be in you, and abound more and more." (2 Peter i. 8; 1 Thess. iv. 1.) We can never have too much: Paul prays that we "may abound in hope." (Rom. xv. 13.) Presumption does not lie in having too high thoughts of the mercy of God in Christ; for that is infinite, beyond all our conceptions; but in a vain expectation of that from God which is inconsistent with his justice and holiness, and contrary to his revealed will. It is not the great hope, but the groundless hope, that is presumption: therefore, tell the devil to his face, thou wilt "hope more and more;" (Psalm lxxi. 14;) that thy hope is a growing hope; so far from being too great, that thou dost judge it yet too little, daily praying for its further increase. This is the way to quench those fiery darts. We may observe that when temptations do work so contrary to the devil's intentions, that, instead of drawing us into evil, they incite us to more watchfulness, and prove occasions of good and provocations to duty, they presently vanish and die. The devil would have it so, and usually it is so, unless God by a special hand do continue us under them for the further exercise of grace.

(2.) *If thy hope be small and weak, the devil will call it "despair."*—He would make thee believe, a little grace is no grace: he will argue from thy weakness in grace to thy total want of it. If under such temptation thou findest thy spirit sinking, ready to faint away, rouse-up thyself, and bespeak thy soul, as David did: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" and take these following DIRECTIONS:—

(i.) *Consider: It is not the degree of grace, but the truth of grace, to which salvation is promised.*

(ii.) *Put a just value and estimate upon the lowest degree of grace.*—That it may not seem contemptible and as nothing in thy sight. It is more worth than the whole world, "a pearl of great price."

(iii.) *Labour to distinguish aright between the weakness of thy grace, and the grace itself that is under that weakness.*—And whilst thou art mourning under one, be sure you rejoice in the other. Do not throw away one corn with the chaff; do not sweep up one groat with the dust behind the door: but light thy candle, and find it out. Do not bury thy talent because it is a single one; but be faithful over a little, and thou shalt be "made ruler over many things." (Matt. xxv. 21.)

(iv.) *Consider the many promises that are made to the lowest degree of grace.*—If there be any good thing in thy heart toward the Lord thy God, he accepts of the will for the deed, of the day of small things. "He will not quench the smoking flax, nor break the bruised reed."

To whom little is given, of them little is required : the widow's mite is a great deal in the account of God. Therefore think and judge of thyself, not according to any thing inherent in thee, be it more or less, but according to the measure of acceptance thou hast with God. It is his kindness that makes thee great ; (2 Sam. xxii. 36 ; ) his "favour is better than life." If he hath wrought that in thee which is beautiful in his sight, why should you so much except against his workmanship as to blot all out again, drawing the black lines of dismal despair upon the comely features of true and saving hope, though weak and small for the present ? The high esteem God hath of the lowest degree of true grace in his saints, should make them not to droop so much under it, but rather be better pleased with what God is so well pleased with.

(v.) *Consider how ill God takes it of his children, when they suffer themselves to be persuaded by the devil out of all good liking and esteem of those smaller measures of grace that God hath given them.*—When they are brought out of conceit of themselves and of every thing that God hath done for them, as if their case were now desperate : "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God ?" (Isai. xl. 27.) Let me speak my thoughts out : My brethren, to deny the least measure of grace in us or to us, against plain demonstrations and evidences brought to convince us of it, is a kind of denying Christ himself, which we would be loath to be guilty of for a thousand worlds ; and yet may not Christ say ?—"I have sent-in provision into such a soul, and have often invited myself to come and sup with him : I have come into my garden to gather my myrrh, and to eat of my pleasant fruits, which my own hand had planted there. (Canticles v. 1.) But I had no entertainment, no welcome ; they would be known of nothing that ever they had from me, plead nothing but poverty and bare walls. And did I not know it to be otherwise,—that I have laid-in a sufficiency of grace, and that there is that in the house which I love and could feed heartily upon,—I should not take it ill that they set nothing before me. But it is great unkindness not to give me of my own, not to entertain me at my own cost ; but to tell me to my face that all my fruit is rotten fruit, all my meat unsavoury meat, all my wine adulterated wine, nothing fit for them or me to feed upon ; all is stark naught ; they are never the better for any thing I have yet done for them ; to seek of every thing : their faith is dead, their hope is presumption, or else quite vanished into despair ; their love is cold and false ; every grace is counterfeit." Christ must needs take this very ill : many of the children of God are greatly guilty in this thing. I would press this consideration upon those who do too, too much indulge themselves in these despondencies, still multiplying objections against themselves, and meditating evasions how to put-off Christ and the promises, how to distinguish themselves out of the favour of God. I know, there is a great deal of pity and commiseration due to such ; but when other means will not prevail, they must not take it ill if we endeavour to fright them out of their fears and doubts, telling them plainly what an offence, what an affront it is to Christ, to have all his kindnesses overlooked and slighted as nothing worth by a froward, habitual, querulous scrupulosity, which is jealous of every thing but itself.

(vi.) When the devil is urging thee to conclude thy weak hope to be downright despair, instead of disputing with the devil about the truth of any grace, labour, through the help of the Spirit, to act it in that degree which thou hast attained.—Then, if it be as a grain of mustard-seed, it will remove mountains. It is not imaginable what great things a little grace will do, when stirred up and acted; the strength of God is in it: “Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings he ordains strength.” (Psalm viii. 2.) The smallest degree of true grace is able to secure itself against the gates of hell, at least so far as to prevent a total overthrow. Nay, let me say further, though with submission, I am persuaded that never any child of God fell before a temptation, under the actual exercise of that measure of grace, be it more or less, that God hath given him to withstand it. I do not Arminianize upon *facienti quod in se est, &c.*; \* I speak not of the power of nature; but true grace, acted to the highest degree of attainment: it is that which does great things, and hath the blessing: “He that is faithful in a little, shall be ruler over much.” But if the good man slumber and sleep, no wonder if the enemy break-in upon him. When we are putting-forth ourselves to the utmost in any conflicts with Satan, “God with the temptation will find out a way of escape, that we may be able to bear it.” (1 Cor. x. 13.) “In that very hour it shall be given.” (Mark xiii. 11; Matt. x. 19.) When we seem to be surprised and over-matched by a temptation, God will come-in with more strength, and out of weakness we shall become strong. (Heb. xi. 34.) Thus little David overcomes great Goliath with a sling and a stone: the devil himself flies from the children of God, when they resist him in the strength of that grace they have. “To him that hath, shall be given.” “The weak shall be as David, and David as God,” *vel*, [“or,”] “as the angel of God.” (Zech. xii. 8.)

Many times weak Christians do not put forth that strength which they have. Would they but “lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees,” (Heb. xii. 12,) their spirits would return, and their courage would increase, and something might be done: but, alas! they give way to their fears and despairing thoughts, lie flat upon the ground, and give up all for lost. They do not attend to the actings of their hope whilst it goes by another name; all is “despair;” as good never a whit, as never the better; it is to no purpose for them to do any thing; they are past recovery, undone for ever. O, my brethren, do not give the devil such an advantage against you; but set yourselves to act that grace you have, be it never so little. Look among the ashes, blow up the least sparks you see; you do not know how soon it may break out into a flame: and remember this, that repeated acts of weak grace are equivalent to strong grace, both as to thy success, and God’s acceptance, who requires no more of thee than what is proportionable to that which he hath given to thee.

(vii.) Consider, that all graces are joined with their contraries in this state of imperfection here below.—No faith but is unequally yoked with some unbelief, no hope without some despair and desponding: that which is perfect is not yet come, and that which is imperfect is not yet done away. We are flesh, as well as spirit; and they are two contraries. As there is some kind of hope in presumption, so there may be some

\* “To him who does what is in himself,” &c.—EDIT.

kind of despair in hope: no degree of true Christian hope is consistent with the damning sin of final despair; but some degrees of despondency, and that which thou callest "despair," and which in a degree is so, may be consistent with saving hope. And so it holds true in all other graces, from that mixture of corruption wherein the weakness of every grace doth lie; yet grace is grace still, hath all its essential parts, and deserves not that nick-name which thou puttest upon it; all dimness is not stark blindness, every cloud doth not make midnight. What! must you have all, or none? It is indeed a sign of sincerity to covet all grace, and as true a sign of humility and submission to the will of God thankfully to accept of a little, owning those first-fruits of the Spirit, which in due time will be seconded with an after-increase to thy plenary content and satisfaction. Our heavenly Father waters every plant of his own planting, that it may bring forth more fruit: therefore do not call every weak act of hope "despair;" do not call every fit of despair "final despair." What! if the sun be set, must it never rise more? If thou art cast down, art thou utterly forsaken? If mercy is at present gone out of thy sight, must it be clean gone for ever? These are but the breakings-out of those peccant humours that will be predominant sometimes in the best of men.

By what hath been said, we may answer those objections, which the devil makes against our hope from the weakness of it. I have but one thing more to add, by way of direction to weak believers, who are never in more danger of being drawn into despair, than when they are musing upon their sins, examining and judging themselves by the law, charging themselves home with all that guilt that lies upon them, in order to their further humiliation in the sight of God. Then does the devil many times strike-in, and suggest such frightful considerations to them, that make them start back further than God would have them. Therefore I shall now show how we should prepare ourselves for, how we should order and manage ourselves under, a deep and serious consideration of our sins and unworthiness; which we are called to and it is requisite, the swelling temper of our proud hearts requiring it, sometimes to set ourselves apart for this work. (Zech. xii. 12.)

1. The direction is this: *Take down along with thee into the valley of conviction, contrition, and self-abhorrency, so much of a sense of God's love and free grace in Christ, as may keep thee from being overwhelmed, and from sinking into despair.*—Before you set out, be sure you have some hold, at least of the hem, of the garment of Christ's righteousness: you know not what foul weather, what storms and tempests, what thunder and lightning you may meet with before you return. Carry your cordial along with you, though you never smell to it, or taste it, but in a fainting-fit. My meaning is: you should take, at least, some general view of mercy, before you take a strict, particular view of sin: usually they are the deepest and truest humiliations that are occasioned by some previous sense of God's love to us. (Ezek. xvi. 61, 63.)

A man that is to go down into a deep pit, he does not throw himself headlong into it, or leap down at all adventures, but fastens a rope at top upon a cross-beam, or some sure place, and so lets himself down by degrees: so, let thyself down into the consideration of thy sin, hanging



upon Christ; and when thou art gone so low that thou canst endure no longer, but art ready to be overcome with the horror and darkness of thy miserable estate, dwell not too long at the gates of hell, lest the devil pull thee in; but wind thyself up again by renewed acts of faith, and fly for refuge unto the hope that is set before thee; (Heb. vi. 18;) and all the way thou goest, admire the infinite grace and love of God to thee in delivering thee from so great a death. My brethren, there is no entering into the maze and labyrinth of sin without this clue in your hands. Solitary considerations of sin, if we dwell too long upon them, will work too violently: therefore we should make frequent transitions from sin to free grace, from the law to the gospel, from our miserable and wretched selves to our merciful and mighty Redeemer. "But," you will say, "how can this be? To pass from one contrary passion to another, who can make such transitions?" The Schools tell us, it must be *per magnum conatum*, "by some great endeavour," that is, a strain beyond ordinary; and such endeavours we must put forth, counting it as much our duty to rejoice in mercy, as to mourn for sin. And we cannot do both at once: though there be a connexion of divine graces as well as moral virtues, yet this implies rather a successive continuation than any simultaneousness, at least as to the intense actings of different graces. It is true, where there is one grace, there is every grace, that is, *in semine*, "in the seed" or root of it; and it may be able also, as to some weaker, latent, actual influences; yet those particular graces which upon different, distinct considerations do work contrary passions in us,—they cannot be both intensely acted at the same time, *sed per vices et intervalla* ["but by turns and at intervals"]. There is a time to mourn, and a time to rejoice, a time to fear, and a time to hope: particular graces do take their turns in the soul, and act suitably unto the present occasion.

2. *Direction against despair for unbelievers, convinced of sin, but unacquainted with Christ and free grace.*—The distraction, fear, and amazement of spirit that seizes upon such is inexpressible. Till God break-in upon them, and begin with them, speaking peace to them, man can do little; yet means must be used. I shall name a few things:—

(1.) *Look upon this conviction of sin [which] thou liest under rather as a mercy than a judgment.*—As a token for good; inasmuch as God hath given thee timely notice of thy danger, and fair warning to flee from the wrath to come.

(2.) *Look upon thyself now in a far greater capacity for grace and pardon than ever heretofore.*

(3.) *Set thyself with all seriousness to study the doctrine of free grace in Christ.*—Never more need than now. Meditate much upon the great goodness of God, and his "excellent loving-kindness." (Psalm xxxi. 19; xxxvi. 7.) Intense thoughts of sin, and slight, perfunctory thoughts of mercy, drive us to despair.

(4.) *Be persuaded to come to Christ under all thy fears.*—Hast thou been as a dove of the valley, mourning on the mountains for thy iniquity? (Ezek. vii. 16.) Come down from those mountains, those solitary places, and go weeping to the Lord. (Jer. l. 4.) Bemoan thyself at the feet of Christ: he will hear thee. (Jer. xxxi. 18, 19.) Tell God all thou hast to say of thy miserable condition. Complaining to thyself

and to men signifies little; it heightens thy fear: but God sympathizes with thee. (Verse 20.) Put thyself into his hands; he will lead thee; (verse 9;) “refreshing will come from the presence of the Lord;” (Acts iii. 19;) there will be a “lifting-up.” (Job xxii. 29.) Whatever the issue be, thou canst be no worse than thou art in thy own judgment: to sin is *mors animæ*, but to despair is *descendere in infernum*; sin is “death,” and despair is “hell.” Cry out of the belly of that hell to Christ, and see if he do not bring thee forth.

#### OBJECTIONS.

But, alas! those who are under a spirit of bondage and fear have a thousand objections against this [which] I have been pressing them to. I shall go over some of these, and answer them as I go.

I. *They come to Christ! They will tell us, they cannot come!*

ANSWER. Tell the Lord, then, thou art willing to come, but canst not be persuaded to come as thou canst. Canst thou not go into thy chamber, into thy closet, and shut thy door, and throw thyself down in the dust before the Lord? This is the coming; and this thou canst do, I am sure: do it, then, and call upon the name of the Lord.

II. *“But I cannot pray.”*

ANSWER. It may be, not now at this time; but how canst thou tell what thou mayest do at such a time, when, in obedience to an ordinance of God, thou hast put thyself into a praying posture? In that very hour it may be given, and hath been, I am persuaded, to thousands of God’s children: he will prepare thy heart. (Psalm x. 17.) If thou canst not utter thy mind as thou wouldest, pray as thou canst; and if thou hast nothing to say, if no one savoury expression drops from thee, it may be, it is because the inward sense thou hast of sin is too big for utterance. It may be so sometimes, and it is best when it is so; and then, out of the abundance of thy heart, “weep and mourn-out thy inward meaning:” *Lacrymæ pondera vocis habent.* [“Tears possess all the potency of earnest speech.”] Groan and sigh, and look wishfully toward heaven; and believe that God sees thee, when thou hast no sight of him: this is prayer.

III. *“But I have lived hitherto as without God in the world, neglecting prayer altogether. I am a mere stranger unto Christ; and will he hear such an one as I, who come upon this pinch, just when necessity drives me? Certainly no; he will tell me to my face, (as well he may,) he knows me not, and bid me go to those empty creatures I formerly trusted in.”*

ANSWER. Do not you take upon you to personate Christ in his dealings with sinners: his thoughts are not as your thoughts. What, if you would do thus and thus if you were in Christ’s stead? does it therefore follow that he must do so too? O no; as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his thoughts above thy thoughts. (Isai. lv. 8, 9.) Do you think and say what you will, Christ will act like himself, and do that for thee that never entered into thy heart to conceive of. His ways are “unsearchable and past our finding out;” his “love passeth knowledge;” thou dost not know, thou canst not tell before-hand, what infinite, rich grace is able to do for thee. O, come, then, and make a trial, and know, for thy further encouragement, that poor humble sinners

are always welcome to Christ, but never more welcome than at their first coming. (Luke xv. 22—32.) There are two jubilees kept in heaven,—one at the conversion of a sinner here on earth; (Luke xv. 7;) the other at his glorification in heaven: (Jude 24:) Christ does then “present us to glory with exceeding joy.” How glad is Christ, when he hath brought a sinner safe and sound to heaven, and secured him there to all eternity! I mention this, to show the great delight Christ takes in showing mercy to poor sinners, in opposition to those evil surmises and hard thoughts which thou hast of him.

IV. But yet, it may be, thou repliest: “My case is not the case of common sinners: none so great an offender as I, no sins like mine, capable of such high aggravations. Were there but one man in the whole world to be damned, and to go to hell, I have reason to believe that I am he; and since things are so bad with me, I cannot be comforted.”

ANSWER. This is a sad case indeed: we see objections rise higher and higher, and doubting souls, out of our very answers to one objection, will pick out matter for another. But I am loath to leave thee behind me in the very bottom of the pit; let me, then, reach down a helping-hand to thee once more, let me give thee one lift more; and I hope, in answering this objection, I shall answer all, and silence thy unbelief for ever. Is it so, that thou art the worst of men, the greatest of sinners, under matchless guilt? Be it so; we will admit all this to be true, and take thee under that black character which thou hast now given of thyself; and yet I say, there is hope. My advice to thee in short is this: Come as the greatest sinner that ever was in the world to Christ, and I dare undertake for thy welcome; let that which hath been hitherto thy discouragement, turn now to thy great encouragement. Christ “came not to the whole, but to the sick; not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance,” even the greatest of sinners; and since thou takest thyself to be so, obey this loud call, and come immediately to Christ. “Though thy sins be as scarlet and as crimson, they shall be as white as snow and as wool.” (Isai. i. 18.) “Therefore turn thou to thy God, and wait continually on him,” (Hosea xii. 6,) *etiam cum ad culmen perveneris omnium peccatorum*, (as ZANCHIUS upon the place, *De Religione*, lib. i.,) “when thou art come to the height of all sin and wickedness.” Thus, whoever thou art, O poor, trembling, doubting soul, remember, that God hath once more called thee to come to Christ this day; to come as thou art, in thy rags, in thy poverty, in thy emptiness and insufficiency, that he may be all in all to thee.

Though means and ordinances do not presently take off our doubts, and overcome our fears, and fully satisfy our souls, but still we remain hopeless and heartless and unbelieving; yet if they do so far prevail with us as to put us upon the trial and use of those means [which] we are directed to, compelling us to comply with the counsel that God gives us by his ministers, this may be a sign for good, that God hath taken a secret hold of thy heart, and is drawing thee on in the way wherein he will be found. Go home, then, and say, “Though I am as cloudy and dark as ever, unsatisfied as ever; though I have no heart to come to Christ, no expectation of any success in coming; yet I will come, however, if it be but to satisfy the importunity of others, of the ministers of

the gospel, who in Christ's name and in his stead do so earnestly beseech me once more to make trial of the freeness of his grace." Tell Jesus Christ *who* sent you : we will own it at the last day, and justify our message to you. Tell him, then, what thou hast heard this day, and that thou couldest not make away with thyself, and throw thyself headlong into hell, till thou hast once more exposed thyself to his wonted pity and commiseration to such as thou art. Tell him, thy soul is ready to break for the longing desire it hath for Christ ; cry out and say, " How long, Lord, holy and true ? When wilt thou shine out upon thy poor creature, who is walking in the valley of the shadow of death, and can see no light ? O, make haste to help ! O, arise and save me ! Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly with relief and succour to my poor soul ! "

Offer thyself in this manner to Christ, present thyself thus before the Lord ; and if thou findest thyself " pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that thou despairest even of life," (as 2 Cor. i. 8, 9,) O, then, cast thyself, burden and all, upon Jesus Christ. (Matt. xi. 28.) And when thou canst not gather comfort from any present sensible impressions made upon thy heart, then argue from promises made to thy coming ; take them as an answer from God to thee ; and make thy best of them, as David did, Psalm cxix. 81 : " My soul fainteth for thy salvation : but I hope in thy word." Hath not Christ said ?—" Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." (John vi. 37.) If he should never speak one word more to thee all thy days, here is enough said already to support thee. We say, *Omne præteritum est necessarium* : " That which is past can never be recalled : " Christ will never unsay what is passed out of his lips ; keep thy hold here, and thou art safe to eternity. Nothing but raptures and particular revelations, some strong sensible feelings of comfort, will satisfy some ; whereas, indeed, God hath revealed his whole counsel to us in the scriptures, and has nothing more to say to sinners than what is already expressed in the gospel. The particular answers that God gives his people sometimes, what are they, but inward repetitions of gospel-promises to the heart, sealed up there by the Spirit ?

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## SERMON XXV.

BY THE REV. CHRISTOPHER FOWLER, A. M.,

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HOW A CHRISTIAN MAY GET SUCH A FAITH THAT IS NOT ONLY  
SAVING, BUT COMFORTABLE AND JOYFUL AT PRESENT.

*Whom having not seen, ye love ; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.—*  
1 Peter i. 8.

THE question which this text was chosen to resolve is, *How a Christian may get such a faith as is not only saving at the last, but comfort-*