

SERMON XV.

Opening the sixth Motive to come to CHRIST, contained in the sixth and last Title of CHRIST.

LUKE ii. 25.

—*Waiting for the [Consolation] of Israel.*

SEVERAL glorious titles of Christ have been already spoken to, out of each of which much comfort flows to believers: It is comfortable to a wounded soul to eye him as a *Physician*; comfortable to a condemned and unworthy soul to look upon him under the notion of *mercy*: The loveliness, the desirableness, and the glory of Christ, are all so many springs of consolation. But now I am to shew you, from this scripture, that the saints have not only much consolation from Christ, but that Christ himself is the *very consolation* of believers: He is pure comfort wrapped up in flesh and blood.

In this context, you have an account of Simeon's prophecy concerning Christ; and in this text, a description of the person and quality of Simeon himself, who is described two ways.

1. By his *practice*.

2. By his *principle*.

His practice was heavenly and holy; he was a *just and devout man*: The principle from which his righteousness and holiness did flow, was his faith in Christ; "he waited for the consolation of "Israel." In which words, by way of *periphrasis*, we have,

1. A description of Christ, the consolation of Israel.

2. The description of a believer, one that waited for Christ.

First, That *the consolation of Israel* is a phrase descriptive of Jesus Christ, is beyond all doubt, if you consult ver. 26. where he, i. e. Simeon is satisfied by receiving Christ into his arms, *the consolation* for which he had so long waited.

Secondly, * And that waiting for Christ is a phrase describing the believers of those times that preceded the incarnation of Christ is past doubt; they all waited for that blessed day: But it was Simeon's lot to fall just upon that happy point of time, wherein the prophecies and promises of his incarnation were fulfilled. Simeon and others that waited with him, were sensible that the time of the promise was come, which could not but raise (as indeed it did) a general expectation of him, John ix. 19. But Simeon's faith was

* It was a phrase common and well known among the Jews at that time, by which the coming of Christ was signified. *Ludov. Capell.*

confirmed by a particular revelation, ver. 26. That he should see Christ before he saw death, which could not but greatly encourage and raise his expectation to look out for him, whose coming would be the greatest consolation to the whole *Israel* of God. *The consolation* παρακλησις. The Spirit is frequently called in scripture, παρακλητης, *the Comforter*: But Christ in this place is called παρακλησις, *comfort*, or *consolation itself*: The reason of both is given in John xvi. 14. “He shall take of mine and shew it unto you:” Where Christ is said to be the matter, and the Spirit, the applier of true comfort to the people of God. Now this consolation is here expressed both with a singular *emphasis* [*the consolation*] intimating that there is nothing of consolation in any thing besides him; all other comforts compared with this, are not worth naming. And as it is emphatically expressed, so it is also limited and bounded within the compass of God’s *Israel*, i. e. true believers, stiled the *Israel of God*, whether Jews or Gentiles, Gal. vi. 16. From whence the point of doctrine is,

Doct. That Jesus Christ is the only consolation of believers, and of none besides them.

So speaks the apostle, Phil. iii. 3. “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.” Those that *worship God in the Spirit* are sincere believers; to such sincere believers, Christ is consolation, *our rejoicing is in Christ Jesus*: And they have no consolation in any thing beside him; nothing in the world can give them comfort without Christ, *We have no confidence in the flesh*. The gospel is glad tidings of great joy; but that which makes it to be so is Jesus Christ, whom it imparts and reveals to us, Luke ii. 10, 11. In the opening of this comfortable point, four things must be spoken to, for the right stating the method of our discourse, viz.

1. What is meant by consolation.
2. That Christ, and he only, is consolation to believers.
3. That believers only have consolation in Christ.
4. How it comes to pass that any believer should be dejected, since Christ is consolation to all believers.

The first thing to be opened, is the nature of consolation, which is nothing else but *the cheerfulness of a man’s spirit, whereby he is upheld, and fortified against all evils felt, or feared*. Consolation is to the soul what health is to the body after wasting sickness; or the reviving spring to the earth after a long and hard winter. And there are three sorts of consolation, or comfort, suitable to the disposition and temper of the mind, viz.

Natural,
Sinful, and
Spiritual.

Natural comfort is the refreshment of our natural spirits by the good creatures of God, Acts xiv. 17. "Filling their hearts with food and gladness." *Sinful comfort* is the satisfaction and pleasure men take in the fulfilling of their lusts, by the abuse of the creatures of God, James v. 5. "Ye have lived in pleasure upon earth," i. e. your life hath been a life of sensuality and sin.

Spiritual comfort is the refreshment, peace, and joy, gracious souls have in Christ, by the exercise of faith, hope, and other graces, Rom. v. 2. And this only deserves the name of true solid consolation: To which four things are required.

First, That the matter thereof be some *spiritual*, eminent, and durable good; else our consolation in it will be but as the crackling of thorns under a pot, a sudden blaze, quickly extinct with the failing matter of it. Christ only gives the matter of solid, durable consolation; the righteousness of Christ, the pardon of sin, the favour of God, the hopes of glory, are the substantial materials of a believer's consolation, Rom. v. 2. Mat. ix. 2. Psal. iv. 6, 7. 2 Pet. i. 8. Things are as their foundations be.

Secondly, *Interest* and propriety in these comfortable things, are requisite to our consolation by them, Luke i. 47. "My spirit rejoiceth in God my Saviour." It is no consolation to him that is hungry to see a feast; to him that is poor to see a treasure; if the one may not taste, or the other partake thereof.

Thirdly, *Knowledge*, and evidence of interest, in some degree is requisite to actual consolation, though without it a man may be in the state of consolation; for that which appears not, is (in point of actual comfort) as if it were not.

Fourthly, In order hereunto, the work of the Spirit upon our hearts is requisite, both to give, and clear our interest in Christ and the promises: And both these ways he is the Comforter, "The fruit of the Spirit is joy," Gal. v. 22. And thus briefly of the nature of consolation.

Secondly, Next I will shew you that Christ, and he only, is matter of consolation to believers: which will demonstratively appear by this argument.

First, He that brings to their souls all that is comfortable, and removes from their souls all that is uncomfortable, must needs be the only consolation of believers.

But Jesus Christ brings to their souls all that is comfortable, and removes from their souls all that is uncomfortable.

Therefore Christ only is the consolation of believers.

First, Jesus Christ brings whatsoever is comfortable to the soul's

of believers. Is pardon comfortable to a person condemned? Nothing can be matter of greater comfort in this world. Why, this Christ brings to all believers, Jer. xxiii. 6. "And this is the name whereby he shall be called the Lord our righteousness." This cannot but give strong consolation; righteousness is the foundation of peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, Rom. xiv. 17. "The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever," Isa. xxxii. 17. Come to a dejected soul, labouring under the burden of guilt, and say, cheer up, I bring you good tidings, there is such an estate befallen you, or such a troublesome business comfortably ended for you; alas! this will not reach the heart: If you can bring me (saith he) good news from heaven, that my sins are forgiven, and God reconciled, how soon should I be comforted! And therefore (as one well observes) this was the usual receipt with which Christ cured the souls of men and women, when he was here on earth; Son or daughter, "be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee." And, indeed, it is as easy to separate light and warmth from the beams of the sun, as cheerfulness and comfort from the voice of pardon.

Are the hopes and expectations of heaven and glory comfortable! Yes sure, nothing is comfortable if this be not, Rom. v. 2. "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Now, Christ brings to the souls of men all the solid grounds and foundations upon which they build their expectations of glory, Col. i. 27. "Which is Christ, in you, the hope of glory." Name any thing else that is solid matter of comfort to the souls of men, and the grounds thereof will be found in Christ, and in none but Christ; as might easily be demonstrated by the enumeration of multitudes of particular instances, which I cannot now insist upon.

Secondly, Jesus Christ removes from believers whatever is uncomfortable; therein relieving them against all the matters of their affliction and sorrow. As namely,

First, Is sin a burden and matter of trouble to believers? Christ, and none but Christ, removes that burden, Rom. vii. 24, 25. "O wretched man that I am! (saith sin-burdened Paul) who will deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." The satisfaction of his blood, Eph. v. 2. The sanctification of his Spirit, John i. 5, 6. His perfect deliverance of his people from the very being of sin at last, Eph. v. 26, 27. This relieves at present, and removes at last the matter and ground of all their troubles and sorrows for sin.¹

Secondly, Do the temptations of Satan burden believers? O yes, by reason of temptations, they go in trouble and heaviness of spirit. Temptation is an enemy under the walls; temptation greatly endangers, and therefore cannot but greatly afflict the souls of be-

lievers; but Christ brings the only matter of relief against temptations. The intercession of Christ is a singular relief at present, Luke xxii. 32. "But I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." And the promises of Christ are a full relief for the future; "The God of peace shall shortly tread Satan under your feet," Rom. xvi. 20.

Thirdly, Is spiritual *desertion*, and the hiding of God's face, matter of affliction and casting down to believers? Yes, yes, it distresses their hearts, nothing can comfort them; "Thou hidest thy face, and I was troubled," Psal. xxx. 7. Outward afflictions do but break the *skin*, this touches the *quicks*; they like rain fall only upon the tiles, this soaks into the house; but Christ brings to believers substantial matter of consolation against the troubles of desertion: He himself was deserted of God for a time, that they might not be deserted for ever. In him also the relieving promises are made to believers, that notwithstanding God may desert them for a time, yet the union betwixt him and them shall never be dissolved, Heb. xiii. 4. Jer. xxxii. 40. Though he forsake them for a moment, in respect of evidenced favour, yet he will return again and comfort them, Isa. liv. 7. Though Satan pull hard, yet he will never "be able to pluck them out of his Father's hand," John x. 20. O, what relief is this! What consolation is Christ to a deserted believer.

Fourthly, Are outward afflictions matter of dejection and trouble? Alas, who finds them not to be so? How do our hearts fail and our spirits sink under the many smarting rods of God upon us? But our relief and consolation under them all is in Christ Jesus; for the rod that afflicts us is in the hand of Christ that loveth us, Rev. iii. 29. "Whom I love, I rebuke and chasten." His design in affliction is our profit, Heb. xii. 10. That design of his for our good shall certainly be accomplished, Rom. viii. 28. And after that no more afflictions for ever. Rev. xxi. 3, 4. "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." So that upon the whole, two things are most evident.

First, Nothing can comfort the soul without Christ! he is the soul that animates all comforts; they would be dead things without him. Temporal enjoyments, riches, honours, health, relations yield not a drop of true comfort without Christ. Spiritual enjoyments, ministers, ordinances, promises, are fountains sealed and springs shut up; till Christ open them, a man may go comfortless in the midst of them all.

Secondly, No troubles, sorrows, or afflictions can deject or sink the soul that Christ comforteth, 2 Cor. vi. 20. "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." A believer may walk with a heart full of

comfort amidst all the troubles of this world: Christ makes the darkness and troubles to be light round about his people. So that the conclusion stands firm, and never to be shaken, that Christ, and Christ only, is the consolation of believers; which was the thing to be proved.

In the third place, I am to shew you that believers, and none but believers, can have consolation in Christ; which will convincingly appear from the consideration of those things which we laid down before as the requisites to all true spiritual consolation. For,

First, No unbeliever hath the *materials*, out of which spiritual comfort is made, which (as I there told you) must be some solid, spiritual, and eternal good, as Christ and the covenant are: what do unregenerate men rejoice in but trifles and mere vanities, in a thing of nought? Amos vi. 13. See how their mirth is described in Job xxi. 12. "They take their timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ." He doth not say, they take the Bible, turn to the promises, and rejoice in Christ and the covenant; it is not the melody of a good conscience, the joy of the Holy Ghost; no, no, they have no acquaintance with such music as that; but the rejoicing of believers is in those things, 2 Cor. i. 12. and this is well built consolation, which reaches the heart.

Secondly, I told you that propriety and interest in Christ and the promises are required to all spiritual consolation: but no unbeliever hath any title or interest in Christ and the promises, and so they can signify nothing to him in point of comfort. It is not another man's money, but my own, that must feed, clothe and comfort me; nor is it another man's Christ, but my own Christ, that must justify, save, and comfort my soul.

Thirdly, You were told, that evidence of a man's peace and reconciliation with God, is necessary to his actual consolation, which no unbeliever can possibly have; he hath neither grace within him to make him a qualified subject of any special promise, nor any witness or seal of the Spirit, to confirm and clear his propriety in Christ; for he never seals, but where he first sanctifies. So that it is beyond all contradiction, that believers, and none but believers are partakers of the consolations that are in Christ Jesus.

Fourthly and lastly, There is one inquiry remains to be satisfied; namely, seeing Jesus Christ is consolation to believers, how it comes to pass, that so many believers in the world should walk so dejectedly as they do, without any spiritual consolation?

First, This need not be wondered at, if we consider that the consolations of Christ are of two sorts; *seminal* and in preparation, or *actual* in present possession. Every *believer* in the world hath the root and seed of comfort planted and sown for him, Psal. xcvi. 11. "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in

“heart.” They have Christ and the promises, which are the seeds of consolation, and will bring forth joy at last, though at present they have no actual consolation; the seed of all joy is sown, and in due time they shall reap the full ripe fruit thereof.

Secondly, It must be remembered, that *interest* and *evidence* are distinct blessings, every *believer* hath interest in Christ: but every *believer* hath not the evidence thereof, Isa. l. 10. “Who is among you, that feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of his servant; that walketh in darkness, and hath no light?” Every child of God is not of sufficient age to know his Father, or take comfort in that blessed inheritance whereunto he is begotten again, 1 Pet. i. 3, 4.

Thirdly, Every believer doth not walk with like strictness, and exact holiness: all do not exercise faith in a like degree. Among Christians some are strong in grace, rich in faith, strict in obedience, tender of sin to an eminent degree; these usually are owners of much consolation: but others are weak in grace, poor in faith, comparatively careless of their hearts and ways, frequently grieving the good Spirit of God, and wounding their own consciences (the vessel into which spiritual consolation is poured;) and these are usually denied the joy and comfort which others abound withal.

Fourthly, The consolations of Christ are arbitrarily dispensed by the Spirit, who is the Comforter, and giveth to every man in such proportions, and at such seasons, as pleaseth him: whence it comes to pass, that he that is rich in comfort to-day, may be poor to-morrow; and, contrarily, the heart that is quite full of sorrow one hour, is filled with peace and joy in believing in the next. Things that are necessary to *the being* of a Christian, are fixed and stable; but things belonging only to the well-being of a Christian, come and go, according to the good pleasure and appointment of the Spirit. The use of all follows.

Inf. 1. Hence it follows, *That the state of unbelievers is the most sad and uncomfortable state in the world, having no interest in Christ, the consolation of Israel.* It is true, they abound in creature-comforts; they live in pleasure upon earth; joy displays its colours in their faces; but for all this, there is not the least drop of true consolation in any of their hearts; they have some comfort in the creature, but none in Christ: that little they gather from the creature now, is all their portion of joy, Luke vi. 24. “Ye have received your consolation:” as this is all they have, so they shall enjoy it but a little while, Job xxi. 13, 17. And while they do enjoy it, it is mixed with many gripes of conscience, Job xiv. 13. “Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness.” Whatever consolation any unbeliever speaks of besides this, is but by rote; for when the day of his distress cometh, and the terrors of con-

science shall awake him out of his pleasant dreams, all his sensual joys will vanish from him, and the doors of true consolation will be shut against him. Let him go to Jesus Christ, knock at that door, and say, Lord Jesus, thy name is consolation: my heart is ready to burst within me; hast thou no consolation for me? O Lord, for one drop of spiritual comfort now; but alas there is none, no not in Christ himself, for any unbeliever. It is children's bread, the saints privilege; comfort and grace are undivided. Let him return into himself, search his own conscience for comfort, and say, O conscience! thou art more than a thousand witnesses, and thousands have been comforted by thee; where thou speakest comfort, none can speak trouble; hast thou no consolation for me in my deepest distress? Alas, no; if God condemn thee, wherewithal shall I comfort thee? I can speak neither more nor less than the scriptures put into my mouth, and I find not one word in all the book of God warranting me to be thy comforter. Believe it is an undoubted truth (though the sense of the bewitched world over-rules it) that the state of unbelievers, even at the best, is a sad and dismal state.

Inf. 2. Let all believers fetch all their comfort out of Christ, who is the consolation of his people: "We rejoice (saith the apostle) in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." That is the true temper of a believing soul: take heed you live not partly upon Christ and partly upon the creature for your comfort; much rather beware that you forsake not Christ, the fountain of living waters, and hew out cisterns for yourselves which can hold no water, Jer. ii. 13. If you make any creature the spring and fountain of your comfort, assuredly God will dry up that spring. If your souls draw their comfort from any creature, you know they must out-live that creature, and what then will you do for comfort? Besides, as your comforts are, so are you. The food of every creature is suitable to its nature. You see divers creatures feeding upon several parts of the same herb, the bee upon the flower, the bird upon the seeds, the sheep upon the stalk, and the swine upon the root, according to their nature so is their food. Sensual men feed upon sensual things, spiritual men upon spiritual things; as your food is, so are you. If carnal comforts can content thy heart, sure thy heart must then be a very carnal heart. Yea, and let Christians themselves take heed, that they fetch not their consolations out of themselves instead of Christ. Your graces and duties are excellent means and instruments, but not the ground-work and foundation of your comfort, they are useful buckets to draw, but not the well itself in which the springs of consolation rise. If you put your duties in the room of Christ, Christ will put your comforts out of the reach of your duties.

Inf. 3. If Christ be the consolation of believers, what a comfortable life should all believers live in the world? Certainly, if the fault be not your own, you might live the happiest and comfortablest lives of all men in the world. If you would not be a discomfort to Christ, he would be a comfort to you every day, and in every condition, to the end of your lives. Your condition abounds with all the helps and advantages of consolation. You have the command of Christ to warrant your comforts, Phil. iv. 4. You have the Spirit of Christ for a spring of comfort; you have the scriptures of Christ for the rules of comfort; you have the duties of religion for the means of comfort. Why is it then that you go comfortless? If your afflictions be many in the world, yet your encouragements are more in Christ. Your troubles in the world have been turned into joy, but your comforts in Christ can never be turned into trouble. Why should troubles obstruct your comfort, when the blessing of Christ upon your troubles makes them subservient to promote your happiness? Rom. viii. 28. Shake off despondency then, and live up to the principles of religion. Your dejected life is uncomfortable to yourselves, and of very ill use to others.

Inf. 4. If Christ be the consolation of believers, then let all that desire comfort in this world, or in that to come, embrace Jesus Christ, and get real union with him. The same hour you shall be in Christ, you shall also be at the fountain-head of all consolations: thy soul shall be then a pardoned soul, and a pardoned soul hath all reason in the world to be a joyful soul: in that day the conscience shall be sprinkled with the blood of Christ; and a sprinkled conscience hath all the reason in the world to be a comforting conscience: in that day you become the children of your Father in heaven, and he that hath a Father in heaven, hath all reason to be the joyfullest man upon earth; in that day you are delivered from the sting and hurt of death; and he that is delivered from the sting of death, hath the best reason to take in the comfort of life. O come to Christ! come to Christ! till you come to Christ, no true comfort can come to you.