

THE RETURN OF PRAYERS:

A TREATISE

WHEREIN

‘HOW TO DISCERN GOD’S ANSWERS TO OUR PRAYERS’
IS BRIEFLY RESOLVED.

WITH

OBSERVATIONS UPON PSALM LXXXV. 8, CONCERNING
GOD’S SPEAKING PEACE, &c.

‘I WILL WATCH TO SEE WHAT HE WILL SAY UNTO ME.’---HAB. 2. 1.

TO THE MUCH-HONOURED KNIGHT,

SIR NATHANIEL RICH.

SIR,

God, who from all eternity hath had an infinite mass of grace and glory lying by him to bestow upon his church, and did accordingly provide a treasury and magazine sufficient wherein to store up all, the bosom of his Son ; in whom are hid riches so unsearchable, Eph. iii. 8, as cannot be told over, much less spent to all eternity.

He hath as richly (πλουσίως, Tit. iii. 6) shed his Holy Spirit on us ; that we, who could never have known of anything bequeathed us, nor what to pray for as we ought, might both fully from him know all that God hath given us, and through him lay claim thereto, who maketh intercession for us, and so doth furnish us with a privy key to all that treasury, which otherwise is fast shut up to all the world.

Through which spirit of prayer and supplications thus poured forth, believers come to be at once anointed to the fellowship and execution of those three glorious offices of Christ their head. Not only of priests, by offering up their prayers as spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, but of kings, to rule with God, Hos. xi. 12 ; being hereby made of privy council to the King of kings, so as their counsels and desires expressed in their petitions are said to be fulfilled, Ps. xx. 4, 5, and their decrees in their prayers made, ratified, and established, Job xxii. 27, 28. Nay, further by virtue of this privilege, advanced to such height of favour, as, by their strength in prayer alone, to have power with God himself, Hos. xii. 3, 4 ; and not only with him, but also over him, and in their wrestlings to prevail. Yea, to command : himself hath said it, ' Thus saith the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask of me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me,' Isa. xlv. 11 ; which so transcendent privilege of power is, by the express words of this great charter, universally extended unto all transactions of this lower part of his dominions, whether ecclesiastical, which do concern his sons,—that is, his church,—or whatever other, the more ordinary works of his hands, that belong to common providence, Matt. vi. 10.

And forasmuch as these grand affairs of this his kingdom, as future and to come, are commended to their prayers as their most proper subject about which they are to treat,—‘Ask of me of things to come,’—in this respect they do become as truly prophets also, though not in so full and complete, yet in some kind of true resemblance; not by foretelling, yet by forespeaking in their prayers, things that come to pass. God, who made and upholds this world, and all things in it, by the word of his power, doth likewise rule and govern it by the precedents and prescript rules of the word of his will, Ps. xxv. 10, exactly dispensing unto men both rewards and punishments, according to the tenor of some or other of his promises and threatenings, and former like proceedings therein recorded; though with such various liberty, in respect of the particulars, that his ways remain ‘unsearchable and past finding out:’ that look, as he appointed in the heavens those ordinances of the sun, moon, and stars, by their light, heat, and motion, ‘to rule the day and night,’ to divide and cause the several seasons of the year, and all the changes and alterations that do pass over the animal and natural world; in like manner hath he stretched out that so exceeding broad expanse of his word and law, Ps. cxix. 96—to which the Psalmist doth assimilate it, Ps. xix. 1, 2, compared with Rom. x. 18—over this rational world of angels and men, and therein set his statutes and his judgments, that by the light of precepts, and their influences in rewards and punishments, they might order and direct these his creatures reasonable, and all their actions; also dispose and set out all the issues of them. And seeing his saints they are ‘a people in whose hearts is his law,’ and their delight is to ‘meditate therein both day and night;’ they daily calculating and observing the various aspects, conjunctions, and mixed influences of those innumerable precepts, promises, and threatenings which themselves and others, nations or men, stand under; and by a judgment thence resulting, Jer. viii. 7, so far as they have attained, endeavouring to frame their supplications and petitions according to God’s will: hence their prayers oft full happily succeed, and beforehand do accord to those issues and events that afterwards fall out. That like as the earth comes to be just under the sun and moon in some of their conjunctions, so their desires and prayers sometimes in a direct line fall under, and subordnately concur with, God’s secret purposes, and some revealed promise met in conjunction, to produce such and such effects. ‘The Spirit’ also herein ‘helping their infirmities,’ sometimes so guiding and directing them by a gracious preinstinct, though unbeknown to them, to pitch their requests upon such particulars as God hath fully purposed to bring to pass; becoming thereby, as it were, the spirit of prophecy unto them, respectively in some measure and degree.

Thus doth that great King employ his nearest servants as his under-officers and sheriffs, to serve his writs and executions upon his enemies, to execute the judgment written in his threatenings, Ps. cxlix. 9, and to accomplish his mercies written also, by suing out all the promises; to be as man-midwives, (as Hezekiah’s allusion, when he sent a-visiting to the prophet Isaiah for his voice and suffrage, seemeth to import, Isa. xxxvii. 2–4,) to help and assist

his promises and decrees in their travail with mercies and deliverance, Zeph. ii. 2, when these their children do come unto the birth, and there is no strength to bring them forth.

In all which they shall therefore have the honour to be accounted co-workers together with God in his greatest works of wonder. And at the latter day, when that great and last edition, both of all God's works and likewise ours, then complete and finished, shall be published to all the world, they shall find their names put to them, together with his own; and the same by him acknowledged to be as truly the works of their hearts and prayers as that they are the sole work of his hands and power. Such honour have all his saints.

And if all the works of God are so exceeding great, Ps. xcii. 5, and his thoughts therein so very deep that every iota of them doth deserve our deepest studies and intentions, and thereunto require a proper skill and wisdom, to read his hand, peculiar unto the saints, ver. 6; whereunto there must be adjoined the most diligent search and attentive observation, to find out his meaning in them, Ps. lxxvii. 6; and withal a special inclination and delight to be conversant therein, 'Thy works are very great, sought out of them that have pleasure in them,' Ps. cxi. 2; and if, of all the rest, those choicer pieces, his works of mercy, may challenge our best regard, in which his heart and delights are most, on which his wisdom hath laid on the richest workmanship, in the most curious contrivements of his love, Mic. vii. 18: then surely that selected volume of more special mercies, his epistles, vouchsafed in answer to our prayers, is above all other most exactly to be studied, and most diligently to be perused by us; wherein God doth unbosom himself, and lay open his heart more sweetly, more familiarly unto us, which are directed, and in a manner dedicated more particularly unto ourselves alone: many of them written with his own hand, in a more immediate manner discovered and appearing in them; and all of them come sealed with the impress of everlasting love, and down-laden with the enclosure of the most precious tokens of his special favour. Whoso is wise will observe these things, and they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord, Ps. cvii. 43.

Neither have such favours only more of mercy in the things themselves bestowed, but are further endeared to us by being made our own mercies, by a more peculiar title to them; by which the kindness in them is rendered double. For therein we have that royal liberty to become our own choosers, and contrivers of our own condition, having all the promises thrown down to us, with blanks for us to write our names in which of them we please, which is the greatest liberty. And we have withal his Spirit secretly directing and fixing the needle of our desires to the same point, wherein his great intentions towards us do meet with our best good; which is indeed the truest liberty. And to be made ourselves, whom we love so well, and therefore delight to do good unto, the chiefest instruments under him of our own greatest happiness, is a privilege than which the creature is not made capable of a more transcendent royalty. And when the greatest love, thus rectified,

which possibly we can bear ourselves, hath opened its mouth widest, and stretched our desires in praying to the utmost compass, then will God's infinite vast love not only fit them, but do for us above all that we are able to ask, yea, to think; exceeding abundantly above all; as far above as his thoughts are above our thoughts, which is far more than the heavens are higher than the earth.

All which, when put together, if well considered, how would it provoke us to call in all that precious stock of our time, thoughts, and intentions which we cast away on trifles, to lay out the choicest portion of them in this thriving trade of intercourse with God; the returns whereof are better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. It is the praying Christian that alone employs the riches of the promises, which we usually let lie by us, like dead stock, unimproved: whilst he, like a wise and diligent merchant, looks abroad upon all the affairs of Jesus Christ that are afloat here in this world, and adventures in them all; is watchful to spy out all advantages, and with a holy *πρόνοια* intermeddleth in every business that may bring in glory unto God, good unto the church, grace and comfort to his own soul. And how infinitely rich must that man needs become that puts even God's riches out to use, with the increase of ten talents for one, yea, a hundred-fold!

The due estimate whereof would no less quicken us to as diligent an inquiry, what becomes of all those goodly adventures, the prayers we make; to listen what haven they arrive at,—how, and when, and with what fraught they do return.

In which great duty, and most necessary property of all true merchants, many of the best and greatest dealers, that are diligent enough in praying, are yet found failing and deficient; that omit no gainful opportunity of adventure, but are careless and unobservant of their returns.

Some, through ignorance, it may be, that this is at all a duty, or of any such importance, are careful only how to lade in prayers enough, not expecting to find any of this bread cast upon the waters, until that great and general return of themselves and all the world with joy bringing their sheaves with them. Others, though at present many of their prayers come home after a few days, and richly laden, yet through want of skill to read those bills of exchange which God often writes in an obscurer character, they lie unregarded by them. Many, when voyages prove long, though to their greater advantage when once they do return, yet in the meantime, through discouragement, they give all for lost, as we do ships at sea we cannot hear of. The most are commonly complaining that their adventures still miscarry, and that little or nothing comes of all their prayers. And all are negligent of keeping their books of accounts, to cast up their comings in and goings out the one with the other. By which they lose the chiefest portion of that comfort which for the present God hath here allotted to us to live upon, the revenues of their prayers. And God also is not only robbed of that custom of his glory which should thence accrue, but wronged also by standing still

as debtor in their accounts to many prayers, in the return of which he hath been creditor long ago.

I have endeavoured in this small treatise to convince believers of the grand importance of this duty, which is so full of gain ; to discover likewise the causes of the neglect herein, and remove the temptations and discouragements which do occasion it ; and have briefly resolved such cases as do more usually occur in the practice of it. But principally my desire was to give in some few experiments and observations which may help to teach the weaker sort, though not perfectly to read, yet here and there to spell, and especially out of the impressions in their own hearts, God's meaning towards them in his answers. I have cast in some scattered calculations of broken prayers cast up, which though they will not amount to make general and perfect tables out of, yet may serve as instances and examples for young beginners, to direct them in the exercise of this most useful skill and wisdom, how to compute and balance their accounts by comparing their prayers and their returns together.

This small and imperfect embryo I have presumed to send forth into the world ; and directed it first of all to present its service unto you, and make an honourable and thankful mention of your name. Your worth deserves a more costly, large, and lasting monument for this inscription. Your own abilities of learning, eloquence, and depth of wisdom in human affairs, would you be persuaded to lay them out as you are able, would erect such a remembrance and sumptuous memorial of you when you are gathered to your fathers, as would bear some proportion to your great worth. But that which emboldened me was the near affinity which meditations of this nature do hold with those other your more retired thoughts you think to none but God and your own soul. You have been long a frequent and constant dealer in this blessed way of intercourse with God in private. Those that know you, know your strict observance of those exchange hours you have devoted to meet with God and enjoy communion with him. But, above all, it was that personal obligation under which a great and special favour from you long since brought me, upon which I devoted (with myself) the first of my labours unto your service. And it became one great relief unto my thoughts, weighing the many inconveniences of appearing thus in public, that it gave so full occasion to pay my vows thus openly before all the world ; which having now done, God, that is rich in mercy to all that call upon him, fill you with all grace, and fulfil all your petitions !—So prays,

Your worship's obliged to love and serve you,

THOMAS GOODWIN.

THE RETURN OF PRAYERS.

I will hear what God the Lord will speak : for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints : but let them not turn again to folly.—
PSALM LXXXV. 8.

The coherence of the words.

THIS psalm was penned in the name and for the comfort of the whole church of the Jews, both as a prophecy of, and a prayer for, their return out of the Babylonish captivity, and the flowing in again of that ancient glory, peace, administration of justice, liberty of God's ordinances, plenty and increase, which formerly they enjoyed, but had now suffered an ebb of seventy years' continuance. And first he beginneth with prayer, from the first verse to this we have in hand, putting the Lord in mind of, and urging him with his gracious dealings in former times unto his church. This is not the first time, saith he, that the church hath been in captivity, and that thou hast returned it, (as out of Egypt, &c.,) and therefore we hope that thou wilt do so again: 'Thou hast been favourable unto thy land,' &c. His prayer being finished, and he having spoke, he now stands and listens, as you use to do when you expect an echo, what echo he should have, what answer would be returned from heaven, whither his prayer had already come: 'I will hear what the Lord will speak;' or, as some read it, 'I hear what the Lord doth speak:' for sometimes there is a present echo, a speedy answer returned to a man's heart, even ere the prayer is half finished; as unto Daniel, chap. ix. 20, 21. And in brief it is this, 'The Lord will speak peace unto his people:' this answer he finds written at the bottom of the petition, but with this clause of admonition for time to come added, 'But let them not return again to folly;'—a good use to be made of so gracious an answer.

CHAPTER I.

The main observation and subject of this discourse thence deduced : That God's people are diligently to observe the answers to their prayers.—The reasons of it.

THESE words being especially spoken in relation to God's returning answer to his prayer made, therefore in that relation I mean principally to handle them.

The observation is this : That when a man hath put up prayers to God, he is to rest assured that God will in mercy answer his prayers ; and to listen diligently, and observe how his prayers are answered : both are here to be observed. 'I will hear what God will speak ;' that is, how he will accomplish them : and withal he confidently expresseth an assurance that 'God will speak peace.' Thus doth the church, Mic. vii. 7, 'I will look to the Lord ; I will wait ; my God will hear me : ' she was both sure of gracious audience with him,—'my God will hear me,'—and she will wait till he answers her ; and observe how he doth it, 'I will look to the Lord ;' and, ver. 9, 'I will bear the indignation of the Lord till he plead my cause.' So Habakkuk, he having made a prayer against the tyranny of Nebuchadnezzar, in the first chapter, having ended it, he begins the second chapter thus, 'I will stand upon my watch tower, and see what he will answer me : ' and in the end an answer comes, ver. 2 ; and as he thus waited for a vision, for sometimes their prophecies were in answer to their prayers, so should we for an answer unto ours.

Reason 1.—Because otherwise you take an ordinance of God in vain in your hearts, which is to take God's name, with whom in that ordinance you deal, in vain ; for it is a sign you think your prayer not an effectual means to attain that end it is ordained for, and say secretly in your hearts, as they, Job xxi. 15, 'What profit have we if we pray to him ? ' For if we use any means, and expect not the end, it is a sign we think the means vain to accomplish that end. Whereas every faithful prayer is ordained of God to be a means to obtain what we desire and pray for, and is not put up in vain, but shall have answer : 1 John v. 14, 15, 'This is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us.' It is true God heareth an enemy, but to hear with favour is the hearing there meant ; and is so used in our ordinary speech, as we say of a favourite that he hath the king's ear ; and if a man be obstinate to a man's counsel, we say he would not hear, though he give the hearing : so here, to hear is a word of gracious inclination to do the thing required ; and thus God's ears are said to be open to their prayers ; and so it follows there, that 'if he heareth us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.' As soon as we have prayed, we are said to have our petitions,—that is, they are then granted,—and we may be confident they are assented unto by God ; although in regard to outward dispensation, the com-

mand for accomplishment is not yet come forth : even as a petitioner is said to have his suit when the word of the king is gone forth that it shall be done, though it passeth not the seal, or be not signed a good while after. And like as when a wicked man sinneth, as soon as the act is committed, so soon doth sentence from God go forth against the sinner, but the execution overtakes him not, it may be, a good while after, according to that of Solomon, Eccles. viii. 11, ‘sentence against an evil-doer is not presently executed;’ it is presently sentenced, as the words imply, but not executed : so in like manner falleth it out when a godly man prays, that as soon as the prayer arrives in heaven, which is in an instant, so soon is the petition granted,—so Dan. ix. 23, ‘At the beginning of his prayer the command came forth,’ though the angel, who brought the answer, arrived not at him till towards the end in the evening, ver. 21,—but the real accomplishment of it may be deferred. So as no prayer in respect of an answer to it is in vain ; but where God hath given a heart to speak, he hath an ear to hear : which not to regard, is to take an ordinance in vain, which is God’s name.

Reason 2.—And, secondly, not simply God’s name, as in an ordinance made known, but also his name, that is, his attributes, are taken in vain. For it is a sign you think of that God you pray to, that either ‘his ear is heavy, that he cannot hear, or his hand shortened, that he cannot save,’ or his heart straitened, and his bowels restrained, that he will not : and thus you rob him, and despoil him of one of his most royal titles, whereby he styles himself, Ps. lxxv. 2, ‘a God that heareth prayers;’ who is so regardful of them, that, in 1 Kings viii. 59, they are said to be ‘nigh the Lord day and night;’ they are all before him, and he sets them in his view, as we do letters of friends, which we stick in our windows, that we may remember to answer them, or lay them not out of our bosoms, that we might be sure not to forget them : so the petitions of his people pass not out of his sight, till he sends an answer, which is called ‘speaking’ here; God speaking as well in his works as in his word. But you, by your neglect herein, make an idol god of him, such as were the vanities of the heathen, as if he ‘had ears and heard not, eyes and saw not’ your need, &c. Such a god as Elias mocked; ‘You must speak aloud,’ says he, ‘he may be in a journey,’ &c. Even such a god do you make the God of heaven and earth to be, whilst you put no more confidence in him, or make no more reckoning of your prayers to him than the heathens did of their sacrifices to their gods. Petitioners do not only put up their requests, but use to wait at great men’s doors, and inquire, and listen what answer is given unto them ; and it is part of an honour to great men that we do so : and for the same end are we also to wait on God, to shew his greatness, and our distance from him, and dependence upon him. ‘As the eyes of the servants look to the hand of their masters, so do we,’ saith David, ‘on thee, till thou hast mercy on us,’ Ps. cxxiii. 2. And, Ps. cxxx., after he had prayed, ver. 2, he says he ‘waited more than they that watch for the morning;’ like those that having some great business to do on the morrow, long for the daylight, and look often out to spy the day; so he for a glimmering and dawning of an answer. The like we have Psalm v. 3, ‘In the morning will I direct my prayer to thee, and look,’ that is, for an answer.

Reason 3.—Again, if God doth give you an answer, if you mind it not, you let God speak to you in vain, when you do not listen to what he answers. If two men walk together, and the one, when himself hath said and spoke what he would, listens not, but is regardless of what the other answers, he exceedingly slights the man. As, *non respondere pro convitio est*, not to

answer again is contempt ; so, *non attendere*, not to attend to what one says. Now our speaking to God by prayers, and his speaking to us by answers thereunto, is one great part of our walking with God ; and to study out his dealings with us, to compare our prayers and his answers together, which are as dialogues between us and him. It is said of Samuel's prophecy, that not a word of it fell to the ground, 1 Sam. iii. 19 : and so it may be said of our prayers ; and so it ought to be of God's answers, not a word of them should fall to the ground ; as there doth, if you by your observation and listening thereunto catch them not, (as Benhadad's servants are said to do Ahab's words,) apprehend and observe them not. And by the same reason that you are to observe the fulfilling of God's promises, you are of your prayers also. Now, 1 Kings viii. 56, it is said, 'not one word failed of all he promised.' Solomon had observed this by a particular survey and register made of all that God had spoken and done for them, and found not a promise unperformed. And there is the like reason both of answers to prayers and for our observing of them, for prayers are but putting promises into suit ; and therefore Solomon brings those words in there to this very purpose, to confirm their faith in this, that no prayers made would fail, being grounded on a promise ; thereby to encourage others and his own heart to diligence herein, as also as a motive unto God to hear him ; for, ver. 59, he infers upon it, 'Let my words be nigh thee,' &c., seeing thou always thus performest thy good word unto thy people.

Reason 4.—Yea, you will provoke the Lord not to answer at all ; he will forbear to answer, because he sees it will be thus in vain. When a man is talking to one that listens not to him, he will cease to answer, and leave off speaking ; and so will God. So as that which the Apostle says of faith, Heb. x. 36, that it is not enough to believe, but 'when you have done the will of God, you have need of patience' to eke out faith, 'that you may inherit the promises,' may be also said, and is alike true, of praying. It is not enough to pray, but after you have prayed, you have need to listen for an answer, that you may receive your prayers ; God will not fulfil them else. As he said, the sermon was not *done* when yet the preacher had done, because it is not done till practised ; so our prayers are not done when yet made, but you must further wait for and attend the accomplishment.

Reason 5.—If you observe not his answers, how shall you bless God and return thanks to him for hearing your prayers ? Ps. cxvi. 1, 'I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplication ;' and therefore he goes on to thank him throughout the whole psalm. You are to 'watch unto prayer with thanksgiving,' Col. iv. 2 ; and therefore, as to watch, to observe, and recollect your own wants, which you are to pray for, that you may have matter of requests to put up, so also to observe God's answers for matter of thanksgiving ; and many fill that commonplace head full of matter to furnish them for petitioning, but as for this other of thanksgiving, they watch not unto it against they come to pray, nor study matter for that head also. And if any study will furnish you this way, it is the studying out of God's answers to your prayers. The reason you pray so much, and give thanks so little is, that you observe not God's answers ; you do not study them. When we have put up a faithful prayer, God is made our debtor by promise, and we are to take notice of his payment, and give him an acknowledgment of the receipt of it ; he loseth of his glory else.

Reason 6.—As God loseth, so yourselves also the experience which you might get thereby. (1.) Both experience of God and his faithfulness, which will cause in you hope and confidence in God another time, when you have

found him again and again answering your prayers. It was a speech of one eminent in holiness, upon occasion of the accomplishment of a great request made to God by him, that God having never denied him any request, 'I have tried God often, now,' says he, 'henceforth I will trust him.' If the hearing the prayers of another will encourage us to go to God,—as Ps. xxxii. 6, 'For this cause shall every one that is godly pray unto thee,'—much more when we observe and have experience that our own are heard; therefore, says David, Ps. cxvi. 2, 'The Lord hath heard me, and I will call upon him as long as I live;' as if he had said, Now that God hath heard me, I know whither to go: this experiment, if I had no more, is enough to encourage me for ever to pray unto God; I have learned by it to call upon him as long as I live. And also, (2.) by observing God's answers to your prayers, you will gain much insight into your own hearts, and ways, and prayers, and may thereby learn how to judge of them. So, Ps. lxvi. 18, 19, David's assurance that he did not regard iniquity in his heart was strengthened by God's having heard his prayers; for thus he reasons, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear me; but God hath heard me.' For, [1.] if God doth not grant your petitions, it will put you to study a reason of that his dealing; and so you will come to search into your prayers and the carriage of your hearts, therein to see whether you did not pray amiss: according to that, 'Ye lust and have not, . . . because ye ask amiss,' James iv. 3. As if you send to a friend, who is punctual in that point of friendship of returning answers, and useth not to fail, and you receive no answer from him, you will begin to think there is something in it. And so also here, when a petition is denied, you will be jealous of yourselves, and inquisitive what should be the matter; and so by that search come to see that in your prayers which you will learn to mend the next time. Or, [2.] if they be answered, yet because that therein usually God deals in a proportion with you to your prayers,—as you might perceive if you would observe his dealings with you,—you would by this means come to have much insight into God's acceptation and opinion of your ways: for you should see his dealings with you, and yours with him, to be exceeding parallel and correspondent, and hold proportion each with other. So, Ps. xviii. 6, 'In my distress I called upon the Lord;' and so, ver. 7, 8, &c., he goes on to describe his deliverance, which was the fruit of those prayers, and then, at ver. 20, 21, &c., he adds his observation upon both, 'According to the cleanness of my hands hath he dealt with me,' &c. 'For with the pure thou shalt shew thyself pure.'

Reason 7.—You will lose much of your comfort. There is no greater joy than to see prayers answered, or to see souls converted by us: John xvi. 24, 'Ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full.' The receiving answers makes joy to abound and overflow. Yea, even when we pray for others, if our prayers be answered for them, our joys are exceeding great; much more when in our own behalf. And therein, even in the smallest things which a Christian doth enjoy, doth his comfort exceed another's, that he hath them by virtue of prayers and promises. he knows how he came by them. If 'stolen waters be sweet, and bread eaten in secret,' &c., (as Solomon says, Prov. ix. 17,) to wicked men, begged meat is much more sweet to godly men; yea, in the very praying for outward mercies, there is more sweetness than they have in enjoying them. As it is joy to a good heart to see any one converted, but much more to him that is the means of it,—'I have no greater joy,' says St John, 'than that my children walk in truth,' 3 Epist. 4,—so to see God do good to his church, and hear others' prayers, is a comfort, but much more to see him do it at a man's own prayers. Therefore, when

God restores comfort to a drooping soul, he is said, Isa. lvii. 18, to 'restore comfort also to his mourners,' that is, to those that prayed and mourned for him, as well as unto that soul itself; it being a comfort to them to see their prayers answered. Comfort it is many ways: (1.) To hear from God, as to hear from a friend, though it be but two or three words, and that about a small matter; if there be at the bottom this subscription, 'your loving father,' or, 'your assured friend,' it satisfies abundantly; so also, (2.) to know that God is mindful of us, accepts our works, fulfils his promises. (3.) How doth it rejoice one to find another of his mind in a controversy; but that God and we should be of one mind, and concur in the desire of the same things,—not two in the earth only agree, Matt. xviii. 19, but God who is in heaven and we to agree,—this rejoiceth the heart exceedingly. And thus it is when a man perceives his prayer answered. Therefore you lose much of your comfort in blessings when you do not observe answers to your prayers.

CHAPTER II

Three cases propounded : the first concerning prayers for the church, and for the accomplishment of such promises as may fall out in ages to come.

Now as for rules and helps to find out God's meaning towards you in your prayers, and to spy out answers, and how to know when God doth anything in answer to your prayers, this is the next thing to be handled : wherein, first, I will answer some cases and queries which may fall out in several sorts of prayers, about the answering of them.

1. As, first, concerning prayers put up for the church, for the accomplishment of such things as fall out in ages to come.

2. Concerning prayers made for others, of your friends, kindred, &c.

3. Concerning those prayers, whether for yourselves or others, wherein others join with you.

1. For the first :—

(1.) There may be some prayers which you must be content never yourselves to see answered in this world, the accomplishment of them not falling out in your time : such as are those you haply make for the calling of the Jews, the utter downfall of God's enemies, the flourishing of the gospel, the full purity and liberty of God's ordinances, the particular flourishing and good of the society and place you live in. All you whose hearts are right do treasure up many such prayers as these, and sow much of such precious seed, which you must be content to have the church, it may be, in after ages to reap ; all which prayers are not yet lost, but will have answers : for as God is an eternal God, and Christ's righteousness an 'everlasting righteousness,' and therefore of eternal efficacy, Dan. ix. 24, 'being offered up by the eternal Spirit,' Heb. ix. 14, so are prayers also, which are the work of the eternal Spirit of Christ, made to that God in his name, and in him are eternally accepted, and of eternal force, and therefore may take place in after ages. So the prayer that St Stephen made for his persecutors took place in Saul when St Stephen was dead. So David's prayer against Judas, Ps. cix. 8, 9, took effect above a thousand years after, as appears, Acts i. 20. So the prayers of the church, for three hundred years, in the primitive times, that kings might come to the knowledge of the truth, and they 'lead peaceable and quiet lives, in all godliness and honesty,' (which St Paul, in Nero's time, exhorted unto, 1 Tim. ii. 2,) were not answered and accomplished till Constantine's time, when the church brought forth a man-child, Rev. xii. 5. So, Isa. lviii., after he had exhorted to, and given directions for fasting and prayer in a right manner, he adjoineth this promise, 'Thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations ; thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach ;' namely, for this, because his fasting and prayers might have influence into many ages yet to come, in the accomplishment of what was prayed for. And that which Christ says of the apostles' reaping the fruit of St John the Baptist's ministry, and the seed he had sown, is in like manner

herein verified, John iv. 37, 'One soweth and another reapeth.' And in this sense, that which the Papists say is true, that there is a common treasury of the church, not of their merits, but of their prayers. There are bottles of tears a-filling, vials a-filling to be poured out for the destruction of God's enemies. What a collection of prayers hath there been these many ages towards it! And that may be one reason why God will do such great things towards the end of the world, even because there hath been so great a stock of prayers going for so many ages, which is now to be returned. And herein it falls out to us in our prayers as in their prophecies to the prophets of old: 1 Pet. i. 11, 'The Spirit in them did signify the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things that are now revealed.' And thus is it in the spirit of prayer, which is instead of the spirit of prophecy; for we pray through the guidance of the Spirit, 'who teacheth us what to ask,' for many things that come to pass in after ages.

(2.) Only at present in prayer it may be that thou hast revealed unto thee, by a secret impression made on thy spirit, that these things shall come to pass, and so hast thy faith confirmed in them, and withal an evidence, that even for thy prayers, among others, God will perform them; and that the contribution of thy prayers doth help to make up the sum. And upon such prayers God usually for the present also testifies the acceptation of a man's person, and reveals himself most to him that he is his, as he did to Moses: he never revealed his love to Moses more than when he prayed most for God's people. And haply thou hast that as one of thy best evidences of the uprightness of thy heart, that thou canst pray for the church's good, though for a long time to come, which thou mayest never behold with thine eyes, even as David also did, and rejoiced in it.

(3.) And when they are accomplished, and thou in heaven, thy joy will surely be the more full for these thy prayers: as at the conversion of those thou hast prayed for, so at the ruin of the church's enemies, &c., whom thou didst pray against; for if there be joy in heaven at the conversion of a sinner, as at the birth of a new prince and heir of heaven, then haply in a proportion he shall rejoice most whose prayers had most hand in it, and a special interest therein. And so as thy other works, so thy prayers follow thee, and 'the fruit of them,' as Jeremiah speaks, chap. xvii. 10; and, however, yet at the day of judgment thou shalt rejoice, as well as they that enjoyed the fruit of thy prayers in their times, thou having sown the seed of their happiness: 'Both he that sows and he that reaps shall then rejoice together,' as Christ says, John iv. 36.

CHAPTER III.

*The second case, concerning prayers made for others, of our friends, &c.
—How they are answered.*

2. THE second case is concerning answers to our prayers for others, for particular men, as friends and kindred, &c., and likewise for temporal blessings.

Pray for others you know we must ; so the elders of the church for those that are sick, James v. 15, 16 : ‘Pray one for another,’ says St James. As in case a man is troubled with a lust, tell some private friend of it : ‘Confess your sins one to another,’ that when a man’s own prayers are not strong enough to cast it out, it may be done by the help of another’s prayers joined with his. So it follows, ‘that ye may be healed,’ ver. 16, for in that sense I understand healing in ver. 16. So also, 1 John v. 16, ‘If a man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death,’—that is, not against the Holy Ghost,—‘he shall ask life for him, and God shall give him life that sins not unto death.’

Concerning this case, I give these considerations, how such prayers are answered :—

First consideration.—Such prayers God often heareth ; why else are any such promises made ? As, ‘that they shall be healed in their bodies,’ James v. 15, ‘healed of their lusts,’ ver. 16 ; ‘converted to life,’ 1 John v. 16. God hath made these to encourage us to pray, and to testify his abundant love to us ; that it so overflows and runs over, that he will hear us, not only for ourselves, but for others also ; which is a sign we are in extraordinary favour. So God intimates concerning Abraham to Abimelech, Gen. xx. 7, ‘He is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live.’ And as he was a prophet, so we are priests, as for ourselves, so for others also, to God our Father ; and it is a prerogative we have through the fellowship we have, and communion of Christ’s priestly office, ‘who hath made us kings and priests,’ Rev. i. 6, to prevail and intercede for others, and a special token and pledge of extraordinary love ; for if God hears a man’s prayers for others, much more for himself in his own behalf. So when Christ healed the man sick of the palsy, it was, as it is said, for the faith of the standers-by, Matt. ix. 2 : ‘He, seeing their faith, said, Thy sins are forgiven thee.’ The meaning is not as if for their faith’s sake he forgave that man his sins, for, Hab. ii. 4, ‘the just doth live by’ his own ‘faith,’ but to encourage them who out of faith brought that sick man to him, and us all in like manner to bring others and their complaints by prayer before him, he therefore then took occasion to declare and pronounce forgiveness to that poor man ; he therefore then said, ‘Thy sins are forgiven thee.’

Second consideration.—Yet, secondly, prayers for others may often also not obtain the particular thing prayed for them. So Samuel’s prayer for Saul, 1 Sam. xv. 35 ; so David for his enemies, Ps. xxxv. 13.

For it is in this as it is in the use of other means and ordinances for the

good of others ; God making such like kind of promises to our prayers herein as he hath made to our endeavours to convert when we preach to men : that look, as we preach to many, and yet but few believe,—for ‘who hath believed our report ?’ Rom. x. 16, even ‘as many as are ordained to eternal life ;’ we ‘become all to all, and win but some,’—so we pray for many, not knowing who are ordained to eternal life, which whilst we know not, we are yet to pray for them, 1 Tim. ii. 3, 4. Only as where God hath set his ordinance of preaching, it is more than a probable sign he hath some to convert, and usually the word takes among some, though often but a few ; so when he hath stirred up our hearts to pray for others, it is a sign God will hear us for some of those we pray for, yet so as we may be denied. For God doth require it as a duty on our parts, because it is an outward means ordained by God, by which sometimes he useth to bring things to pass ; but yet not as such a certain and infallible means, as he hath tied himself universally unto, to bring the thing to pass on his part.

And though indeed his promise to hear and accept the prayer is general and universal, yet the promise to hear it, by granting the very thing itself prayed for, is but an indefinite promise, such as he makes to other means of doing men good ; as to our admonitions and reproofs, and to our preaching, &c. He makes such promises because sometimes he doth hear and convert by them. For instance, that promise, James v. 15, of healing the sick, cannot be universal ; for it might then be supposed, as a truth implied in it, that sick men might never die, whereas ‘it is appointed for all men once to die,’ Heb. ix. 27, seeing it may be supposed that the elders may at all such times of danger of death still come and pray with them. But the meaning is, that it is an ordinance which God hath made a gracious promise unto, because he often doth restore the sick at their prayers : and therefore upon every such particular occasion, we are to rely upon God for the performance of it by an act of recumbency, though with an act of full assurance that we shall obtain it we cannot ; the promise being not universal, but indefinite.

Of the like nature are all other promises of things temporal and outward, of which we herein speak, as when God promiseth to give long life to them that honour their parents, riches and honours to them that fear him ; the tenor and purport of which promises is not, as if absolutely, infallibly, and universally God doth always perform these to those that are yet truly qualified with the conditions specified in those promises ; the contrary both Scripture instances and common experience shews : they are therefore indefinitely meant, and so to be understood by us. For, because whenever God doth dispense any such mercies to any of his, he would do it by promise ; all his ways to his being truth, that is, the fulfilling of some truth promised ; and also God having purposed in his outward dispensation of things here in this world, to bestow riches and honours upon some that fear him, though not upon all, for how then should ‘all things fall alike to all,’ Eccles. ix. 2, poverty and contempt upon them that fear God, even as well as those that fear him not ? He hath therefore indefinitely expressed his gracious dispensation herein : requiring answerably an act of faith—which principle in us is suited to a promise, as a faculty is to its proper object—suitable to that his meaning in the promise ; that as he intended not in such promises an absolute, infallible, universal obligation of himself to the performance of them to all that fear him, so the act of faith which a man is to put forth toward this promise, in the application of it for his own particular, is not required to be an absolute, infallible persuasion and assurance that God will bestow these outward things upon him, having these qualifications

in him ; but only an indefinite act, as I may so call it, of recumbency and submission, casting and adventuring ourselves upon him for the performance of it to us, not knowing but he may in his outward dispensations make it good to us, yet with submission to his good pleasure, if otherwise he disposeth it.

It is true, indeed, that that act of general assent which faith is to give to this promise, in the general abstract truth of it, is to be an assured certain persuasion and belief that God hath made this promise, and that he certainly will and doth perform it unto some according to his purpose expressed therein ; which act of general assent is that believing without wavering,—namely, of the truth of the promise in general,—which St James calls for in prayer, chap. i. 6. But yet that special act of application, as divines call it, required in this faith, whereby I am to rest upon it for my own particular, is not required to be such an undoubted persuasion as to think that I shall certainly have this particular promise in kind fulfilled to me ; for the truth, purpose, and intent of the promise is not universal, but indefinite. So as it is but an *it may be*, as God elsewhere expresseth such promises, as Zeph. ii. 3, that it shall be performed to me ; and yet because it may be God will perform it unto me, therefore my duty is to cast myself upon God, and put in for it, with submission to his good pleasure for the performance of it to me. So that so far as the truth and intent of it is revealed to be infallible and certain, so far a man is bound to have an answerable act of faith, of certain and infallible persuasion towards it, as to believe without wavering that God hath made such a promise, and will perform it according to his intent in making it, which is unto some. But yet withal, because the tenor of it is but indefinite, and in that respect whether it shall be performed to me or no is not therein certainly revealed ; therefore God requires not of me, in the application of such a promise, an absolute full persuasion that he will perform it to me in such or such a manner, &c. ; but only an act of dependence and adherence, with referring it to his wise and righteous good pleasure towards me.

And yet again, if God should at any time give a man such a special faith concerning any such particular temporal blessing for himself or another, then he is bound to believe it thus in particular : as when he gave power to any to work miracles, as to his apostles he did, with a commission to work them, then they were bound to believe that such and such a miracle should infallibly be wrought by them, as that the devils should be cast out by them, &c. And therefore in this case Christ rebukes his disciples for not believing thus upon such particular occasions, Matt. xvii. 20.

And then it is also true that if God give such a faith, he will infallibly perform it ; and thus those his words are to be understood, Matt. xxi. 22, ‘ Whatsoever ye ask in faith, believing, ye shall receive : ’ he speaks it of the faith of miracles ; for, ver. 21, he had said, ‘ If ye believe and doubt not, ye shall say to this mountain, Remove into the sea, and it shall be removed.’ So that when God works such a faith, and we are called to it, we are bound to believe with a certain persuasion that such a thing will be done, and it shall be done ; but unto such a kind of special faith in temporal promises for ourselves or others, God doth not now always call us. If indeed at any time we did believe and doubted not, by reason of a special faith wrought by God, that God would remove a mountain into the sea, or bestow any outward mercy, it should be done ; for he that stirred up such a faith would accomplish the thing. But it is not that which God requires of believers, that they should without doubting thus believe concerning outward things ;

the promises thereof being not universal but indefinite ; and therefore answerably a man is not absolutely bound to believe that God will certainly bestow such a temporal blessing on him, no, not though he should have the qualification which the promise is made unto, the promise being not universal, made to all so qualified, but indefinite, to some of such so qualified. The case is the same of believing promises made to our praying for others, which is the thing in hand.

Third consideration.—When the prayers are thus made out of conscience of our duty for such whom yet God doth not intend that mercy unto, then they are returned again into our own bosoms, to our advantage ; even as St Paul saith, that his rejoicing that others preached, though they lost their labour, should turn to his salvation, Phil. i. 19. So prayers for others, though to the parties themselves we prayed for they prove in vain, yet they turn to our good. So, Ps. xxxv. 12, 13, when his enemies were sick, David prayed and humbled himself ; ‘and my prayers,’ says he, ‘returned into my bosom.’ David did by this his prayer in secret for his enemies testify the sincerity of his heart to God, and his true forgiveness of them,—for it is the usual disposition of God’s children to pray for them that are the greatest enemies to them,—and this prayer, though it did not profit them, yet it turned to David’s own good ; it came back, and home again to him, with blessings to himself ; God delighting in and rewarding such a disposition in his child, as much as any other, because therein we resemble Christ so truly, and shew that God is our Father, and ourselves to have his bowels in us. And God stirreth up this praying disposition in his children for their enemies, not always that he means to hear them for them, but because he means to draw forth, and so have an occasion to reward, those holy dispositions which are the noblest parts of his image in them, and wherewith he is so much delighted ; and so their prayers return into their own bosom, and it is taken as if they had prayed for themselves all that while. Thus in like manner, when Moses prayed so earnestly for the people of Israel, God offered to return his prayer into his own bosom, and do as much for him alone as he had desired that God would do for them. ‘I will make thee a great nation,’ says God to him, for whom I will do as much for thy sake as thou hast prayed I should do for these. As in preaching the gospel, Christ told the disciples, that if in any house they came to preach peace, there were not a ‘son of peace,’ Luke x. 6, on whom the message might take place, and their peace rest, ‘your peace,’ says he, ‘shall return unto you again.’ So is it if your prayers take not place.

Fourth consideration.—If we have prayed long for those whom God intends not mercy unto, he will in the end cast them out of our prayers and hearts, and take our hearts off from praying for them. That which he did by a revelation from heaven to some prophets of old, as to Samuel and Jeremiah, the same he doth by a more undiscerned work ; that is, by withdrawing assistance to pray for such by withdrawing the spirit of supplication from a man, for some men, and in some businesses. Now thus he did with Samuel : ‘Why dost thou mourn for Saul?’ 1 Sam. xvi. 1. So with Jeremiah, chap. vii. 16, ‘Pray not for this people.’ And this he doth because he is loath when his people do pray but to hear them, and would not that such precious breath as that of prayer is should be without its full and direct success, or be in vain ; therefore when he means not to hear, he lays the key of prayer out of the way, so desirous is he to give answers to every prayer. It falls out in this case of praying for another as in reproving another. One whom God intends not good unto, God will lock up a man’s heart towards

such a man, that he shall not be able to reprove him ; when towards another God doth enlarge it as much, where he intends good. Thus it is sometimes in praying for another ; so as in praying a man shall not be able to pray for, as not to reprove such a man, though his heart was to do both : but it fareth with him as God threateneth concerning Ezekiel towards that people, that he ‘makes his tongue cleave to the roof of his mouth,’ Ezek. iii. 26.

Fifth consideration.—God will hear those prayers for, and answer them in, some others, in whom we shall have as much comfort as in those we prayed for ; and so it often proves and falls out. God, to shew ‘he looks not as man looks,’ nor chooseth as he chooseth, lets our hearts be set on work to pray for the conversion or good of one he intends not mercy to ; and then answers them in some other, whom he makes as dear unto us. When God had cast off Saul, still Samuel’s heart lingered after him, and he mourned for him ; but God, at the same time, when he bids him cease mourning for Saul, 1 Sam. xvi., to shew that yet he accepted that his mourning as it came from him, ‘Go,’ says he, ‘and anoint one of the sons of Jesse,’ 1 Sam. xvi. 1. Samuel desired to see a good successor in that government, and he having been their ruler it was his special care ; he having anointed Saul, it exceedingly grieved him that he should prove so wicked : and God saw and answered the ground of his desires ; and therefore immediately upon his prayers, sent him to anoint the best king that ever was upon that throne, who was the issue and man-child of those his prayers. And again, when Samuel came to anoint one of the sons of Jesse, when he saw Eliab, ver. 6, ‘Surely,’ says he, ‘the Lord’s anointed is before me.’ If Samuel had been to choose, he would have chosen him, and would have prayed for and desired him ; but ‘God seeth not as man seeth,’ ver. 7, and chooseth not as man chooseth ; but in David was his prayer fully heard and answered, and that better. So Abraham, he had prayed for Ishmael, and ‘O let Ishmael live in thy sight !’ Gen. xvii. 18 ; but God gave him Isaac instead of him. So perhaps thou prayest for one child more than for another, out of thy natural affection, looking on his countenance and stature, as Samuel did on Eliab’s ; but yet thy prayers being sincere in the ground of them, in that thou desirest a child of promise, God therefore answers thee, though in another, for whom yet haply thy heart was not so much stirred ; who yet, when he is converted, proves to thee as great a comfort : and it is as much as if that other thou didst most pray for had been wrought upon.

CHAPTER IV.

The third case, about such prayers wherein others join with us.—How therein to discern the influence of our own prayers.

3. THE third case to be considered is, when a man prays for something with others, or which others likewise pray for with him, so as he is not alone in it; how then should he know that his prayers have a hand in obtaining it, as well as theirs? For in such cases Satan is apt to object, Though the thing is granted indeed, yet not for thy prayers, but for the prayers of those others joined in it with thee.

(1.) If thy heart did sympathise and accord in the same holy affections with those others in praying, then it is certain thy voice hath helped to carry it: 'If two agree on earth,' says Christ, Matt. xviii. 19, the word is *συμφωνήσωσιν*; that is, if they harmonially agree to play the same tune; for prayers are music in God's ears, and so called 'melody to God,' Eph. v. 19. It is not simply their agreeing in the thing prayed for, but in the affections; for it is the affections that make the concert and the melody. Now if the same holy affections were touched and struck by God's Spirit in thy heart that in theirs, then thou doest help to make up the concert, and without thee it would have been imperfect; yea, without thee the thing might not have been done, for God stands sometimes upon such a number of voices, and one voice casts it; as when he named ten righteous persons to save Sodom. When therefore the same holy motives and affections affected thee in thy prayer which did them in theirs, it was the work of the same Spirit both in them and thee, and God hath heard thee.

Especially if God did stir up the same secret instinct in thee to sympathise with another in praying for such a thing unbeknown one to another, as sometimes it falls out; then surely thy prayers are in it as well as his. You shall observe sometimes a general instinct of the Spirit put into God's people's hearts, generally to pray for or against a thing, without each other's stirring up one another; even as Ezekiel by the river Chebar prophesied the same things Jeremiah did at home at Jerusalem. Thus against the time that Christ the Messiah came in the flesh, there was a great expectation raised up in the hearts of the godly people to look and pray for him, Luke ii. 27, 38.

(2.) God doth usually and often evidence to a man, that his prayers contributed and went among the rest towards the obtaining of it; as—

[1.] By some circumstance: as, for example, sometimes by ordering it so that that man that prayed most for a thing of concernment, should have the first news of it when it comes to be accomplished; which God doth, as knowing it will be most welcome news to him. God doth herein as we do with a friend, who we know is cordial in, and wisheth well to a business; he sends him the first word of it who was most hearty in it, and prayed most about it. Good old Simeon had surely been earnest in seeking the Lord, as well

as the rest in Jerusalem, to send the Messiah into the world, to restore and raise up the ruins of Israel; for God did reveal to him that he should see him before he died: and therefore to evidence to him his respect to his prayers, God carried the good old man into the temple just at the time when the child was brought into the temple, for to 'be presented to the Lord,' Luke ii. 27, 28. And in like manner good Anna, 'who had served God with fasting and prayer, night and day,' God ordereth it so that she must also come in at the same instant, Luke ii. 38. By some such like peculiar circumstance or other doth God often use to witness to a man's heart that he hath heard him in businesses prayed for in common with others.

[2.] By filling the heart with much joy in the accomplishment of what a man prayed for: which is an evident argument that his prayers did move the Lord to effect it, as well as the prayers of others. Thus that good old Simeon, seeing his prayers now answered, he was even willing to die through joy; and thought he could not die in a better time: 'Lord, now let thy servant depart in peace.' For when the desires have vented and laid out much of themselves, then when the return comes home, they have an answerable part and share in the comfort of it: and as desires abounded in praying, so will joy and comfort also in the accomplishment. As when a ship comes home, not only the chief owners, but every one that ventured shall have a share out of the return, in a proportion to the adventure; so here, though some one whom it mainly concerns hath especial interest in the mercy obtained, yet thou shalt have thy prayers out in joy from God that the thing is granted. St Paul had planted a church at Thessalonica, but he could not stay to water it with his own preaching, yet when absent he waters those plants which he had set, with prayers, night and day: 1 Thess. iii. 10, 'Night and day praying exceedingly for you,' says he. And as his prayers were exceeding abundant for them, so was his joy as abundant in them, when he had heard that they stood steadfast, and fell not back again: 'Now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord,' ver. 8. 'And what thanks can we render to God for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before the Lord?' ver. 9.

[3.] If God give you a heart thankful for a blessing vouchsafed to another, prayed for by you with others, it is another sign your prayers have some hand in it. St Paul knew not what thanks to give for the answering of his prayers, as in that forementioned place. Old Eli had put up but one short ejaculatory petition, that we read of, for Hannah; and that was, 'The Lord grant thy petition!' 1 Sam. i. 17; and for the return of that one prayer, when Hannah related how God had answered her, ver. 26, 27, he returned solemn thanks: 'and he worshipped the Lord there,' ver. 28.

(3.) And, lastly, in case the thing concerned thyself, which was prayed for by others helping thee therein, what cause hast thou but to think that it was granted for thy own prayers, and not for theirs only? seeing God stirred up their hearts to pray for thee, and gave thee a heart to pray for thyself, and besides gave thee the thing which thou desiredst. Which argues thou art beloved as well as they, and accepted as well as they. 'I know this shall turn to my salvation through your prayers,' saith St Paul, Phil. i. 19. Though their prayers went to the business, yet had not St Paul been accepted himself, the prayers of all the men in the world would have done him but little good. God may hear the prayers of the godly for wicked men, when they do not pray themselves, in temporal things: so he did hear

Moses for Pharaoh, Abraham for Abimelech : and he may hear godly men the sooner for others' prayers ; so he heard Aaron and Miriam the sooner for Moses's sake, Num. xii. 13. But if God stirs up thy heart to pray for thyself, as well as others for thee, then God that gave thee a heart to pray hath heard thy prayers also, and hath had a respect to them more in it than to theirs, because it concerned thyself, as a more special mercy unto thee.

CHAPTER V.

Common directions helpful in all cases and prayers.—First, from such observations as may be taken from before, and in praying.

HAVING premised these cases, I come now to more general and common directions to help you in discerning and observing the mind of God, and his answers to you in your prayers. All which directions are such as may be helpful in all the forementioned cases, and in all sorts of prayers whatever. And they are taken from observations to be made upon your prayers, &c., both *before, in, and after* praying.

First, *before* praying ; when God bespeaks a prayer, as I may so speak,—that is, when God secretly speaks to the heart to pray much about a thing. I express it thus according to that phrase of David, Ps. xxvii. 8, ‘Thou saidst, Seek my face, and I said, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.’ Now God then speaks to the heart to pray when not only he puts upon the duty by saying to the conscience, This thou oughtest to do ; but God’s speaking to pray is such as his speech at first was, when he made the world, when he said, ‘Let there be light, and there was light :’ so he says, Let there be a prayer, and there is a prayer ; that is, he pours upon a man a spirit of grace and supplication, a praying disposition ; he puts in motives, suggests arguments and pleas to God ; all which you shall find come in readily, and of themselves, and that likewise with a quickening heat and enlargement of affections, and with a lingering, and longing, and restlessness of spirit to be alone, to pour out the soul to God, and to vent and form those motions and suggestions into a prayer, till you have laid them together and made a prayer of them. And this is a speaking to the heart. And observe such times when God doth thus, and neglect them not, then to strike whilst the iron is hot ; thou hast then his ear ; it is a special opportunity for that business, such a one as thou mayest never have the like. Suitors at court observe *mollissima jandi tempora*, their times of begging when they have kings in a good mood, which they will be sure to take the advantage of ; but especially if they should find that the king himself should begin of himself to speak of the business which they would have of him : and thus that phrase of Ps. x. 17 is understood by some, that God prepares the heart, and causeth the ear to hear ; that is, he fashions it, and composeth it into a praying frame. And sure it is a great sign that God means to hear us when himself shall thus indite the petition.

And by the way let me give this note of difference between these speakings to the heart and those whereby Satan puts us upon such duties at unseasonable hours and times ; as when we are otherwise necessarily to be employed in our callings, to eat, or to sleep, &c. ; then to put upon praying is a device of his he useth to tire out new converts with. The difference will appear in this : the devil comes in a violent imperious manner upon the conscience, but enlargeth not the heart a whit unto the duty ; but whenso-

ever God at such extraordinary by-times doth call upon us, he fits and prepares the heart, and fills the soul with holy suggestions, as materials for the duty; for whatsoever he calls to, he gives abilities withal to the thing he calls for.

And thus usually, when he will have any great matters done and effected, he sets men's hearts a-work to pray by a kind of gracious preinstinct; he stirs them up and toucheth the strings of their hearts by his Spirit sent down upon them. Thus against the return of the captivity he stirred up Daniel's heart, chap. ix. 1; he knowing by books the time to be near expiring, was stirred up to seek God. And so he that made this psalm, 'salvation being then nigh,' Ps. lxxxv. 9, 10; then God stirred him up to pray, and pen this prayer for their return; which God had foretold he would do, Jer. xxix. 10-12. For having promised, ver. 10, I will cause you to return after seventy years; 'then,' says he, ver. 12, 'shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you.' He speaks it not only by way of command, what it was they ought to do, but as prophesying also what they should do; for then he meant to stir up their hearts, as then he did, as appears by those forementioned instances. Therefore observe what things God thus, by an instinct, doth enlarge thy heart to pray for at times, and sometimes at extraordinary by-times, when haply thou didst not think to pray about any such thing; yet he then stirred thee up most, it may be, as thou wert walking, &c., and having spare time, he draws thee into his presence, and moves thee in that manner specified.

Now, secondly, as God thus speaks to the heart to pray, so also *in* praying; and his speaking to the heart in prayer may be discerned by these particulars:—

1. When God quiets, and calms, and contents the heart in prayer, which is done by speaking something to the heart, though what is spoken be not always discerned. If you should see one who was an earnest and importunate suitor, and exceeding anxious when he went in to a great man, but beheld him after coming out from him contented, and quieted, and cheerful in his spirit, you would conceive that certainly something had been said to him which gave him encouragement, satisfaction, and contentment in his suit. Thus when thou goest to God, and hast been importunate in a business,—as suppose for Christ: O give me Christ, or else I die!—and thy desires were exceedingly up for it; but thou risest up with thy mind calmed and satisfied, and feelest the anxiousness, the solicitude of thy heart about the thing taken off and dispelled: this is a good sign: that God hath heard thy prayer, and hath spoken something to thy heart which makes it thus composed. When Hannah, out of much bitterness and with strong desires, which by a long delay had been made more violent, so as her heart was much disquieted,—for, Prov. xiii. 12, 'hope,' and by the same reason desire also, 'deferred makes the soul sick,'—when out of the abundance of her grief she had poured her soul out before the Lord, 1 Sam. i. 16, Eli the priest joining in prayer also for her, 'The Lord grant thy petition;' after that prayer she found her heart so quieted, that 'she looked no more sad,' as the text says there, she arose quieted and calmed, and it was that prayer that did both fill Eli's mouth with that word of prophecy and her heart with quietness, and a secret word from God accompanying it that did still those waves: and accordingly God gave her a son, a son of her desires.

And the like God doth now, by speaking, as I said, something to the heart: as by dropping in some promise or other into the heart, or some like consideration; saying, as it were, to the heart, even as Eli from God did to

her, 'The Lord grants thy petition.' As to St Paul, when he was earnest with God about removing his buffetings by Satan, which whether they were the stirring up a lust, or temptations of blasphemy, I do not now dispute; 'I besought God thrice,' that is, earnestly, says he, 'that it might depart;' and to this he had an answer in the meantime given him, till it should be taken away, enough to still and quiet him: so 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9. 'And he said,—that is, in prayer the Lord did put in this consideration and promise into his thoughts,—'And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee, and my power is made perfect in weakness.' This answer thus coming in, this promise thus seasonably suggested, stayed and quieted Paul's heart. In like manner, thou hast, it may be, been long praying against poverty or the like distress, and God lets fall this or the like promise into thy heart, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee,' Heb. xiii. 5, which quiets and contents thy mind. This is an answer; and observe such answers, for they are precious.

2. If whilst thou art a-praying God doth draw nigh to thy soul, and revealeth himself to it in and upon such or such a particular petition: as in case thou didst mainly intend, when thou didst begin to pray, to set thyself to beg some temporal mercy at his hands, some great matter for the good and prosperity of the church,—as Daniel, chap. ix., did set himself to seek God for the return of the captivity,—and even before thou comest to ask it, or in asking it, God smiles upon thee, welcomes thee, falleth about thy neck and kisseth thee; this thou art to observe as a sign he hears thy prayer, and accepteth both thee and it. When there is such a strong sense of God's favour and presence whilst thou art upon such a suit and request, more than at other times or than in other passages of the same prayer, this is a token God hears thee in that particular, and thou art to observe this his speaking to thy heart; when thus thou shalt no sooner come into his presence to inquire of him, but he says, 'Here I am,' as the promise is, Isa. lviii. 9. Therefore, Ps. lxi. 17, 18, 'Hear me speedily,' says David; 'and,' that I may know thou hearest me, 'draw nigh to me.' Therefore when God draws nigh to thee, it is a sign he hears thee. Daniel having fasted and prayed for three weeks together, chap. x. 2, 3, then an angel came, and one of the three Persons came and told him he was 'a man greatly beloved,' ver. 11, 19. When, in like manner, God by his Spirit comes down, and meets thee, and tells thy heart in secret that thou art his beloved and he is thine, then thy prayers are certainly heard; for if he accepts thy person, much more thy prayers, 1 John v. 13, 14. Men, false men,—false upon the balance, as David speaks, when they come to be tried and weighed,—they will, out of cunning, use suitors most kindly then when they mean to put them off, and deny them their requests; but God, who is truth and faithfulness itself, doth not use so to deal, but when he means to answer the prayer, he withal sometimes reveals his free grace most, to the end they may see and acknowledge the fountain of all to be his everlasting love, and so take the thing granted as a fruit of it, and thereby come to be the more abundantly thankful.

Only let me add this caution, which may be of great use to you: That it is not always infallibly true that when God draws nigh to you in a particular request, that that request in particular shall be granted in that manner you desired; but it is a certain evidence that thy prayer is heard, and that the thing thou askest is agreeable to his will, and that he approves of thee and thy request exceedingly, and thinketh the better of thee for it, and he will give thee it, or something that is better. There may be herein, and sometimes is, a mistake of God's meaning, to think that always then the thing

shall be granted when God draws nigh to a man : experience sometimes shews the contrary.

Quest.—But you will say, Why doth God draw so nigh if he means not to grant it ?

Ans. 1.—He shews thereby his approving will of the thing prayed for. Now God approves many things he decrees not. There is his approving will and his decreeing will. God may shew his approving will of the thing thou askest,—as suppose it be in view a matter which is of great consequence to the church,—which he doth for thy encouragement ; but yet it follows not that his decreeing will is for the accomplishment of that very thing in particular.

Ans. 2.—God may accept the person and the prayer when he doth not grant the thing prayed for ; and by that drawing nigh witness his acceptance of thy person and thy prayer. Yea—

Ans. 3.—That revealing of himself is oftentimes all the answer he intended to such a prayer ; and it is answer enough, too, to enjoy in the stead of a particular mercy the assurance of God's love. As suppose thou didst pray against some evil coming upon his church, which he yet intends to bring, which he did set thy heart a-work to pray against, thereby to manifest the sincerity thereof, and then he, seeing thee thus sincere, draws nigh to thee, and tells thee, however, it shall go well with thee, and that thou art greatly beloved of him ; thou art sometimes to take this for all the answer he means to give. And this he doth sometimes also to content the heart, and prepare it for a denial in the thing ; whereas otherwise the denial of what a Christian hath been earnest in might occasion, as in many it doth, a questioning and doubting of God's love.

3. When God stirs up in the heart a particular faith in a business, as sometimes he doth, and upholds the heart to wait for it, maugre all discouragements. So he did in David, Ps. xxvii. 3. David was then in great hazards by reason of Saul, or Absalom, and those such and so often, as that to sense and outward probabilities he was like never to live quietly again at Jerusalem, and enjoy God's ordinances there in peace ; but for this David had prayed, and had made it as the grand request of his whole life,—as every man hath some one great request of all other, even as he hath some special grace above all other, or gift, &c., so request to God, next to his salvation, as haply for his ministry, or the like, therefore says David, ver. 4, 'This one thing have I desired,'—and accordingly God gave him a special faith in this thing above all other, because it was his great request ; 'In this will I be confident,' ver. 3. And though a host of men should again and again encompass me, says he, yet in this I will be confident, that I shall still escape, and see Jerusalem again, and enjoy the ordinances and live in peace. And though his faith failed him often, as in the persecution of Saul it did, for he said he should 'one day perish by the hand of Saul,' 1 Sam. xxvii. 1, yet at other times his faith was marvellously upheld, and he was confident in this. He used not to be so in other requests thus absolutely, particularly, and distinctly ; and therefore he says, 'In this,' &c. As there is a witness of the Holy Ghost immediate to the heart, sealing up adoption to a man's person, so in some cases there is the like testimony for the obtaining of some eminent thing we have asked. Which particular special faith doth in a kind of similitude answer to the faith of miracles of old, whereby a man had a particular confidence that God would do such a miracle by him. So in and by means of prayer, in some things there may be a particular strengthening and assuring the heart, that God will do such a thing for a man : which I confess

is rare and extraordinary, as also that immediate testimony concerning our persons is, which many want that go to heaven. And haply this other, concerning the accomplishment of special mercies, is much more rare, and but in some businesses, and is a thing which some men are not acquainted with, but yet may be in some cases existent to some men's spirits, as it was to David's in the thing mentioned.

And concerning this also I will also add a caution, as about the former: That it doth not always fall out upon all such kind of evidences made to a man's spirit, and that by God, that the thing prayed for doth come to pass. For these very persuasions stirred up by God, may be and are often but conditional, though thus immediately made to a man's spirit, and are so to be understood, and not peremptory and absolute. It cannot be imagined that all these should always be of greater absoluteness and peremptoriness than were many of those revelations made by God to the prophets, wherein he manifested his gracious purpose towards such a man or people, either to vouchsafe them such a mercy, or bring such a judgment; which forewarnings, though they were particular and express, yet limited and intended with a condition, according to the performance or not performance of which it fell out, either the judgment expressly threatened was diverted, or that good thing which was as directly and fully promised was not bestowed: as it was in the case of Jonah threatening the destruction of Nineveh; and so in the promise concerning Eli's house, 1 Sam. ii. 30, 'I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever:' but now the Lord says it shall not be so, for they had broken the condition which was implied in it, they had despised the Lord; 'and them that despise me,' says God there, 'I will despise.'

In like manner is God's meaning expressed towards us in such like persuasions wrought in us by prayer, to be understood: as that such mercies will surely come to pass, but still under a condition of obedience, and performing of those vows which a man joined with those his petitions, to move the Lord to grant the things; which if a man fail in, or ceaseth to go on to believe, it may and doth often come to pass that things fall out contrary to that persuasion; and then we are apt to question whether it was from God or no; which it might be, and truly wrought by his Spirit, and yet not always absolutely meant,—that was your mistake so to take it,—but conditionally only. For in such great requests of the soul unto God, there use to pass mutual covenants between God and us, and indentures are drawn and sealed unto by us—that is, we in prayer offer and promise to do thus and thus, if God will vouchsafe us such a mercy, and plead it to God to move him to bestow it; and God, he thereupon, it may be, seals a covenant on his part to grant the thing, and works such an undoubted persuasion; but if we, in that interim of waiting for that mercy, do deal falsely in that covenant which we have made, and this even whilst we are yet in dependence upon God for it, whereby it appears that we would have done so much more after we should have received it once,—in this case God denies the thing, and yet notwithstanding that persuasion and evidence was from God that heard the prayer. He said indeed he would do thus and thus for thee,—as he told David, 'I would have given thee much more,'—because thou saidst to him, thou wouldst walk thus and thus, or didst vow this or that to him; thou failest in thy word, upon which God uttered his; and thereupon, says God, as to Eli, 'Now it shall not be so,' and yet God had spoken it afore, and not Satan, nor thine own heart only.

4. When God doth put a restless importunity into the heart, maugre all

discouragements. So in that Psalm xxvii. 4, 'One thing I have desired, and I will seek after it,'—that is, as I have sought it, so I will not leave seeking to God for it. When God maintains this in the heart, it is a sign he hears and will answer; for you know the parable, that the unjust judge heard her for her importunity: therefore when God puts an importunity into the heart, he means to hear.

Only this likewise is to be added in this, there is a double importunity: one out of such an inordinate desire to a thing, as the heart knows not how to be without such a mercy, and so continues to ask, but 'asketh amiss, and so receives not,' James iv. 3. But there is an importunity joined with a subjection to God's will, which, when it runs along with it, then God hath stirred it up; and then look for something to come: otherwise you may be importunate, as 'they seek me daily,' when yet God heard not, Isa. lviii. 2.

CHAPTER VI.

Further observations to be made on the dispositions and carriage of our hearts after prayer, until the issue of the thing prayed for.

NEXT: *after thou hast prayed, observe what God doth towards thee.*

As, *first*, how he doth guide thy feet and heart after praying; there is much in that. That which was the spirit of supplication in a man when he prayed, rests upon him as the spirit of obedience in his course; so as that dependence he hath upon God for the mercy he seeks for, is a special motive and means to keep him fearful of offending, and diligent in duty; to look to his paths, to walk and behave himself as becomes a suitor, as well as to come and pray as a suitor. Thus David, he walked by this principle, Ps. lxvi. 18, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear me;' that consideration still came in as a curb unto sin; and without this a man provokes God, and so casts himself behindhand again, and by sinning loseth what ground he had got by praying. Therefore David, Ps. cxliii. 8-10, when he was to pray, even as for his life, as then he did, it being a deliverance from his enemies he sought, he specially prays God to direct him and keep him, that he might not sin against him; for he knew by sinning he should enervate and spoil all his prayers: not only 'hear me speedily,' says he, but also 'cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; teach me to do thy will.' This he especially prays for, and more than for deliverance, for else he knew God would not hear him. Therefore when thou art in treaty with God for any mercy, observe, doth God still after praying keep thee in a more obedient frame of spirit? It is a sign he intends to answer thee; as in like manner, when he keeps thee from using ill means, &c. When he meant to give David the kingdom, he kept him innocent, and his heart tender, that it smote him but for 'cutting off the lap of Saul's garment:' he was not so tender after. Therefore, in Ps. xviii., when he was delivered from all his enemies, he says, 'God dealt with him according to his uprightness; for I kept myself from mine iniquity.' So also, Ps. xxvii. 11.

Secondly, When God after prayer strengtheneth the heart to wait for the mercy; so, Ps. xxvii. 14, David having prayed, says to his soul, 'Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and he will strengthen thy heart.' Honest men, when they nourish hopes in one that is in dependence on them, who waiteth and is obsequious upon the hopes he hath of a suit, use not to deny him: it were dishonesty in them to keep a man underhand, and then frustrate his expectations; therefore, when God keeps thy soul after praying in such a dependent frame, look for some good answer. And indeed when a man hath prayed long, in the end he begins to wait, as I may so say, rather than pray, though he pray still, because now he looks God should perform. Before,

and at first, he told the Lord he desired it, but now he can with some boldness tell him that he waits for it and expects it. The hope of a godly man and his expectation should make him ashamed if it were not answered, therefore in this case answers use to come.

Both these two last we have together joined, Ps. xxxvii. 34, ‘*Wait on the Lord, AND KEEP HIS WAYS, and he shall exalt thee.*’

CHAPTER VII.

Observations to be made after prayer, upon the issue of what was prayed for ; and, first, if accomplished, whether as the fruit of prayers, or out of common providence.—Helps herein.

WHEN a man hath thus waited, and kept his way, then let him observe the issue and conclusion of what he sought for, how things are cast by God. Now of necessity, one of these two must fall out, that either the thing desired is accomplished, or not accomplished ; and in either of these he may come to spy out answers to his prayers, for prayer may be answered though the thing be not done.

I mean to insist severally on these :—

I. If the thing thou prayest for doth come to pass, then what needest thou doubt of an answer, and whether God heard thee or no ? for thou beholdest it with thine eyes. And so often it falls out, that God doth grant according to the desires of a man's heart ; and not only so, but also fulfils his counsel therein, as it is Ps. xx. 4 ; that is, fulfils not only his desire and aim of his prayer, but in that very way, by that very means, which his judgment and counsel pitch upon in his own thoughts. The desire of the heart may be satisfied when God gives some other thing, but the counsel of the heart is then fulfilled when a man is answered in that particular which his own judgment pitched upon as best for him. For counsel is an act of the understanding, deliberating about means to an end, and directing to choose a particular means tending to an end : so that, as Eliphaz says to Job, chap. xxii. 27, 28, 'Thou shalt make thy prayer to God, and he shall hear thee : and decree a thing, and it shall be established to thee ;' that is, a man is guided to decree and pitch upon such mercies in his prayers as God makes good in particular : he says what he would have, and God performs it ; and this privilege thou shalt have, says Eliphaz there, if thou wilt turn to him, and be acquainted with him, and receive the law from his mouth. Thou shalt not err in praying ; but what thou settest upon to pray for, shall be accordingly granted to thee. Such a man shall have the privilege *ingere sibi fortunam* in a right sense, to be his own chooser, and carver of his own mercies ; and as Christ said, 'Be it according to thy faith,' so God says sometimes, 'Be it according to thy prayers.' And Eliphaz speaks of it as of a special favour, that whereas other prayers are answered obliquely, thine, says he, shall be answered directly, which is more comfortable, as direct beams are, and have more heat in them than collateral and oblique. Thus if a man will hear God and obey him, God will hear him : for if a man be subject to Christ's kingly office, his prophetic office shall guide him, and cause him not to err in his petitions ; but by an unerring providence and preinstinct infused by his Spirit, God will so guide him as to ask even that very thing which God intends to give : whereas of himself he knows not what nor how to ask.

So David asked long life, and God gave it him, Ps. xxi. 2-4. God not only gave him his heart's desire, but 'the request of his lips,' ver. 2. Hannah asked a son, and God answered her in the very thing she desired, and therefore she called him Samuel, 1 Sam. i. 20, 'Because,' says she, 'I asked him of the Lord;' and ver. 27, 'For this child I prayed, and the Lord' did not give another thing instead of it, but 'hath given me my petition I asked of him.' So, 1 Chron. iv. 10, 'Jabez called on God,' it is said, 'and God granted him the thing he requested.' And thus God often deals with his children. And to this end hath God given us his Spirit; and made Christ wisdom unto us, who knows what is good for us, though we do not; and hath, therefore, also commanded us to spy out mercies for ourselves, and then come to him for them: and to this end hath made such particular promises of particular mercies, which he would have us have an eye unto in our prayers; all which is because often he means to bestow the very things we ask.

And yet because although we have the very things we did ask and desire, such is the jealousy and infidelity of our hearts, that we often discern not nor acknowledge that it was our prayers that obtained them from God; but we are apt, when once we have them, either to look but to things below and the second causes of them, though before we did earnestly seek them of God, or else still distrustfully to question whether or no it was at our prayers that he granted them, or out of common providence. Thus Job, in his distemper, chap. ix. 16, 'As though I had called, and God had answered me; yet,' says he, 'I would not believe that he had hearkened to my voice,'—that is, not that he did it in respect to my prayer and request, because he now deals so severely with me,—'for he breaketh me with a tempest,' ver. 17. And thus do our distrustful hearts, which are apt to be unsatisfied with all the clearest pledges of God's favour, and still to misconstrue and pervert them; although God doth answer us upon our calling upon him, yet we will not believe that he hearkened to our prayer in it. Therefore that you may be further enabled to discern how and when things you have prayed for come in by prayer, I give you these further directions:—

Direct. 1.—When God doth a thing in answer to prayers, he often doth it in such a manner that his hand may be in a more than ordinary manner seen in it. There are few prayers, wherein a man hath sought God much, but in the answers of them God discovers himself much, and turns many great wheels in the accomplishment of them, and 'manifests,' as David desires, Ps. xvii. 7, 'his marvellous loving-kindness;' and indeed when God hears prayers that have been a long while a-making, he shews usually half a miracle one way or other.

Now God discovers his immediate hand in the answers of prayers many ways:—

(1.) When he carries a thing through many difficulties; when there were a great many cross wards in a business prayed for, the least whereof would have kept the key from turning, when God shall make, as it were, a key on purpose to unlock it; when God plots and contrives all the passages in a business thou didst pray for, and so accomplisheth it; this is a sign it is a fruit of prayer, and that prayer had been a-making that key all that while. So in bringing David to the kingdom; Joseph out of prison; Mordecai to honour; and likewise St Peter out of prison, which was done at the prayers of the church, Acts xii. He was sleeping between two soldiers, if they had waked he had been discovered; and he was in chains, but they fall off, ver. 6, 7; and the keepers stood before the door, but they mind him not, ver. 6; and when one watch is passed, he passeth quietly through another, ver. 10;

and when both these were passed, an iron gate flies open of its own accord, ver. 10. Now such difficulties are there in many businesses, which yet in the end are accomplished by prayer; iron chains fall off, iron gates, enemies' hearts fly open of their own accord; and though not in that miraculous manner, by the means of an angel, yet no less wonderfully.

(2.) Or, secondly, when God facilitates all means to accomplish the thing which was prayed for, so as all means do in view conspire and combine in it; that thou hast wind and tide, and a fair day, and all the way paved, or, as David says, hast thy 'way made plain before thee;' and there falls out a great conjunction and meeting of many circumstances together to effect it, which had influence into it, whereof if any one had been wanting, haply the thing had not been done: when the thing prayed for is thus granted, prayer then hath done it. Thus, when he delivered the people of Israel out of Egypt, which was the accomplishment of their long desires and prayers,—‘their cry came up,’ the text says,—how were all things facilitated! They that detained them do themselves come and entreat them to go out; yea, ‘are urgent,’ says the text, and that at midnight; nay, hire them to go out with their ear-rings, Exod. xii. 31, 33, 35; and Pharaoh himself then parts lovingly and fairly with them, and desires their prayers, ‘Bless me also,’ ver. 32. Yea, to shew there was no resistance, the text says, ‘a dog did not move his tongue:’ the brute creatures did not disturb them, though at midnight, when those creatures use to be most obstreperous through noises.

(3.) When he doth it suddenly, and accomplisheth the thing thou hast long prayed for, ere thou art aware of it; as the return of the captivity of Babylon, which was the conclusion of many prayers, was done in a trice, ‘they were as men in a dream,’ Ps. cxxvi. 1, they could scarce believe it was so when it was done: it was because they had sown many prayers, which came up on the sudden, ver. 5, 6. So Peter, he was fast asleep, and did not so much as dream of deliverance. So Joseph’s delivery out of prison, and advancement to be the greatest man in the kingdom, the suddenness of it shewed it was God’s remembering of him, and hearing his prayers.

(4.) When God grants the thing with an overplus above what we did ask, and casteth many other mercies in, together with that which we long prayed for; this also may be a sign God did hear our prayers in it; for when he doth hear indeed, he useth ‘to do above what we did ask or think,’ thereby the more to overcome the heart. So David asked ‘long life,’ and he gave him more than he asked, Ps. xxi. 2–5. So Solomon, he asked but wisdom, and he gave him more than he asked; ‘peace, riches, honour,’ and all, with it, 1 Kings iii. 12, 13. Hannah, she asked but ‘one male child,’ 1 Sam. i. 11, but God gave her three sons more, and two daughters, chap. ii. 21. When prayers are answered, usually mercies come thick, they come tumbling in; the thing we prayed for comes not alone: as when sins are punished, then miseries also they come like armies in troops upon us. As temptations likewise come together, and we fall into many of them at once, as St James speaks, chap. i. 2, thus do mercies also.

(5.) When the thing is granted by prayers, there is often some particular circumstance of providence concurrent with it, which is a token for good, and sealeth to us that it is from God; such often as a man himself takes notice of, and which others take notice of also. ‘Shew me a token for good,’ says David, Ps. lxxxvi. 17, ‘that others may see it and be ashamed.’ And such tokens doth God often make small circumstances to be. Things small in themselves may be *magna indicia*, great signs and tokens. For example, Moses and Aaron and the Israelites had long cried to God for the deliverance

of his people, and laid up many prayers; 'their cry came up,' as was said; and when God doth deliver them, what tokens were there of good, and of God's hand in it, and of his answer to their prayers? The text notes, as was observed before, that 'a dog did not bark at their going out,' *Exod. xi. 7*, which was a small circumstance, but it was *magnum indicium*, and so intended by God; for the text adds, 'that ye may know that God puts a difference between the Israelites and the Egyptians.' This was a token of God's hand, to overrule the tongues of rude brute creatures, that use to stir at such unusual noises and at travellers, especially in the night. So when Isaac and Abraham, and his servant also, had prayed for a wife for Isaac, see by what a token God shewed he had heard their prayers: Rebekah was the first that came out to the servant sent to bring a wife for him; and if she be the woman appointed for Isaac, says the servant, *Gen. xxiv. 13, 14*, 'let her offer me drink, and my camels also.' This was a small thing in appearance, but a great *indicium* of God's hand in it; and therefore the servant bowed at it, and worshipped. And the sign in itself was such as argued a good nature in her, and a kind, courteous disposition, which therefore, it may be, he singled out as a token of a meet wife, as a thing especially to be looked at in the marriage choice.

Direct. 2.—Again, the consideration of the time wherein the things we have asked are granted, may much help us to discern whether it be in answer to our prayers; for God, who doth all things in weight and measure, shews his wisdom and love as much in the season as in giving the thing itself. God considereth all times of thy life, and still chooseth the best and fittest to answer thy prayers in: 'In an acceptable time have I heard thee,' so *Isa. xlix. 8*. As David likewise says 'he prayed in an acceptable time,' *Ps. lxi. 13*. So accordingly God answers in the best and most acceptable time to us; for 'he waits to be gracious, for he is a God of judgment,' *Isa. xxx. 18*; that is, he is a wise God, that knows the fittest times and seasons wherein to shew kindnesses, and to deal forth his favours in.

As, *first*, it may be that at that very time when thou hast been most instant and earnest, yea, even whilst thou art a-praying, or presently after, the thing is done and accomplished. To this purpose is that of *Isa. lvi. 24*, that as sometimes 'he hears before they call,' which argues much love to give mercies unsought, so also 'whilst they are speaking I will hear,' and grant the thing, which argues no less love; and he culls out that time on purpose that they might rest assured that it was in answer to their prayer. Thus to assure Hezekiah his prayer was heard, God sent the prophet in unto him whilst he was a-praying and weeping, with his head turned towards the wall. So Isaac, going out to pray in the field, meets his Rebekah then a-coming, that blessing of a good wife being surely the great request temporal he was then in treaty with God for: this Rebekah was the fruit of many prayers. So when St Peter was in prison, the church being gathered together to pray for him, St Peter comes and knocks 'at the same hour,' *Acts xii. 12-17*. So as it often falls out herein, as to the ruler in the gospel, *John iv. 52*, who inquiring diligently, found that 'the same hour that Christ had said to him, Thy son liveth, his son recovered; and so he believed, and his whole household:' so also here, that sometimes the thing is done, or the news of it comes the same hour, or soon after, wherein a man was praying about it, and haply then when the heart was most stirred about it, more than at any time else. This is a sign it was an answer of prayers, and may help to confirm a man's faith in it, as that also did his.

Or, *secondly*, when it is the most acceptable and every way the fittest time

to have the thing granted : at that time when thou hadst most need, and when thy heart was most fit for it. For in answering prayers, God aims especially at two things : to shew his mercy, that a man might magnify and exalt that ; and to have the heart satisfied and filled with joy and contentment in his answer, and the thing made sweet, and a mercy indeed to him : in brief, that his goodness might be delighted in, and his mercy exalted. And for these two purposes he culls out such times when we have most need, and also when our hearts are most subdued and our lusts mortified. For then we are fittest to relish his goodness alone, and not to be drawn away with the carnal sweetness that is in the thing. The one you have expressed, Isa. xxx. 18, 'He waits to be gracious, to have his mercy exalted.' The second intimated, James iv., 'Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, to consume upon your lusts.' Such prayers, whilst the heart is in this temper, the Lord denies, or defers in mercy till the heart be weaned.

For the *first* of these : As, suppose thou didst pray long for assurance of salvation, and joy in the Holy Ghost ; and when thou hadst most need of it, either when 'thy spirit would have failed' without it, as Isa. lvii. 16, or against some great affliction approaching, or some great encounter with the world for the name of Christ, then God filled thy heart with it, &c., that was the fittest time : now hath God heard thy prayer. As St Peter, he was in prison, and had been so for many days ; as appears by the 4th and 5th verses, Acts xii. God could have delivered him all that while the church prayed for him, ver. 5. But God kept him in on purpose till that very night, when in the next morning Herod meant to bring him forth to execution, and then God delivered him at the prayers of the church ; then was the most fit time : as the Psalmist says, 'the full time to have mercy on him was come,' Ps. cii. 13. And then to receive an answer is a sign God did it out of special love, which love he 'would have exalted by thee,' as Isa. xxx. 18.

If, *secondly*, when thy heart was most fit for the mercy, it was granted, then art thou also heard in an acceptable time : for God doth not withhold mercies from those that are his out of want of love ; neither so much for what is past, as for the present evil disposition of their hearts, whereby they are unfit to receive them : and in this sense likewise may that be understood, that God prepareth the heart and heareth the prayer, Ps. x. 17.

As when thy heart is most weaned from that temporal mercy, supposing it such, granted thee upon seeking of it. So David, when had he the kingdom in possession given him ? Then when he was a weaned child, and had his high thoughts, which haply at the first news of it had risen in his mind, purged out, Ps. cxxxi. 2, 'I have no high thoughts,' &c., says he then. Thus when thy heart had let all carnal ends go, and had betaken itself alone to God, for thy portion to be had alone out of him, then the thing prayed for comes to pass ; this was the fittest season.

Obj.—But you will be ready to say, To have a thing when my heart is taken off from it, and even contented not to have it, makes it to be as no mercy ; for where there is no desire there is no rejoicing.

Ans.—If thy desire be taken off the thing, then thou wilt rejoice the more in God now ; and though the thing of itself should now give thee less satisfaction, yet God by the thing will give thee more, and he will make it up : for thou wilt relish his love and sweetness in it now, which is better than life, and therefore much better than that thing enjoyed ; and indeed the violence of the desire before would have made it less sweet, for the thing alone would not have filled and contented that desire when it was an inordinate lust, and so thou wouldest have been vexed with it, rather than satis-

fied, and found a greater vanity in it : but now when it is become a subordinate desire unto God, that the desire is down, and the heart quieted and contented with God in the thing, the heart says, as she said, 'I have enough.' So likewise thou mayest have an affliction thou prayedst long against taken off then when thy heart was most willing to accept thy punishment, Lev. xxvi. 41, as Moses's phrase is, and to submit to God in it.

Direct. 3.—A third thing you are to observe concerning the accomplishment of the thing prayed for, whereby you may discern whether granted in answer to prayers, is, when thou seest God in his dealings with thee, and answering of thee, to deal in a kind of proportion with thy manner of praying and seeking of him, and of walking with him whilst thou wert dependent on him, for such or such a mercy. And as you may see a proportion between sins and punishments, which are the rewards of them, that you can say, Such a sin brought forth this affliction, it is so like the father ; so you might see the like proportion between your prayers and your walking with God, and God's answers to you, and his dealings with you. So did David, Ps. xviii. 24, 'According to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me,' &c. His speech notes some similitude or likeness ; as, for example, the more by-ends or carnal desires you had in praying, and the more you mingled of these with your holy desires, and the more want of zeal, fervency, &c., were found in your prayers, the more you shall, it may be, find of bitterness mingled with the mercy, when it is granted, and so much imperfection and want of comfort in it. So says David in the same psalm, ver. 25, 26, 'With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure.' Pure prayers have pure blessings ; *et è contra*, 'With the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward.' And again, as you in praying sometimes slackened and grew cold, so you might see the business in like manner to cool, and cast backward : as 'when Moses's hands were down, Amalek prevailed ;' but when they were 'lifted up, Israel had the better,' Exod. xvii. 12. God let him see a proportion, which argued his prayer was the means of prevailing. A man finds in praying that his suit sometimes sticks, and goes not on as he expected ; this is because he gives not so good a fee as he was wont, and doth not ply God and solicit him ; but, on the contrary, when he was stirred up to pray, then still he found things to go well. By this a man may clearly see that it was the prayer which God did hear and regarded. Thus, likewise, when a man sees hills and dales in a business, fair hopes often, and then all dashed again, and the thing in the end brought to pass, let him look back upon his prayers. Didst not thou in like manner just thus deal with God ? When thou hadst prayed earnestly, and thought thou hadst even carried it, then dash all again by interposing some sin, and thus again and again ? Herein God would have you observe a proportion ; and it may help you to discern how and when they are answered and obtained by prayer, because God deals thus with you therein in such a proportion to your prayers.

CHAPTER VIII.

Seven observations more, from the effects which the accomplishment of the mercy hath upon the heart, &c.

Direct. 4.—FOURTHLY, Thou mayest discern whether they be in answer to thy prayers by the effects upon thy heart. As—

(1.) If the thing that is granted upon thy prayers draw thy heart more near unto God, it is then certain that it was granted as an answer to thy prayers. Things granted out of ordinary providence only do increase our lusts, and are snares to us, as Saul gave David his daughter Michal to be a snare to him ; so their full tables are made snares, Ps. lxi. 22 ; so God gave the Israelites their will, the things they desired, but withal gave them up to their lusts, Ps. cvi. 15 : he gave them their requests, but sent leanness into their souls. The quails might fat some of their bodies that survived, yet their souls grew lean ; there was a curse upon their spirits ; this new delicate food made their bodies more lustful, they did eat and drink, and rose up to play, Exod. xxxii. 6. But things obtained by prayer are sanctified to us, for every thing is sanctified by prayer, 1 Tim. iv. 5, so as it shall not ensnare nor entangle our hearts. A thing obtained by prayer, as it came from God, so a man will return it to God, and use it for his glory : so Hannah having obtained Samuel by prayer, she returns him unto God, 1 Sam. i. 27, 28, ‘ For this child I prayed ; and God gave me my petition : and therefore also I have lent him to the Lord as long as he liveth.’ If therefore thou findest this his dealing with thee in answering thee to be a kindly motive to cause thee to mourn for sin, and to be as a restraint against sin, it is a sign it was the fruit of prayer. Thus it wrought with David, Ps. vi. 8, ‘ Away from me, ye that work iniquity ; God hath heard the voice of my weeping.’

Also, if thou rejoicest in God more than in the thing obtained ;—so Hannah begins her song when she blesseth God for her child, ‘ My heart rejoiceth in the Lord,’ &c., 1 Sam. ii. 1 ; she rejoiceth not so much in the gift as in the giver and his favour ; more in this, that her prayer was answered, than in the thing obtained ;—this is a sign of having obtained the mercy through prayers, when it is thus sanctified unto a man’s spirit.

(2.) Prayers answered will enlarge thy heart with thankfulness, and thus usually they do. Self-love makes us more forward to pray than to give thanks, for nature is all of the craving and taking hand : but where grace is, there will be no eminent mercy gotten with much struggling but there will be a continued particular thankful remembrance of it a long while after, with much enlargement ; and as prayers abounded, so will thanksgiving abound also. Hannah she makes a song, 1 Sam. ii. 1. Great blessings that are won with prayer are worn with thankfulness : such a man will not ask new, but he will withal give thanks for old. Thankfulness, of all duties, proceeds from pure grace ; therefore, if the Spirit stirs thee unto it, it is a sign he made the prayer. ‘ What thanks shall I render to God for

the joy I have in you?' saith St Paul, 1 Thess. iii. 9, 10. So in all his other epistles, all those he writes to, as he prays for them, so he tells them he gives thanks for them, and for their graces which he had prayed for. And if answering prayers for others makes St Paul so thankful, what when for himself? Prayer and thanks are like the double motion of the lungs; the air that is sucked in by prayer is breathed forth again by thanks. Is thy heart afresh enlarged, as to mourn for past sins long since committed, so in like manner for past mercies won with long prayers, and this for a long while after? it is a sign that they were obtained by prayer.

(3.) If the mercy obtained doth encourage thee to go to God another time, to pray again the more confidently and fervently, it is a sign thou hast got the former that way; for the Holy Ghost having once shewed thee this way of procuring mercy, hence it is thou art thus ready to take the same course another time. Ps. cxvi. 2, 'The Lord hath heard me, and I will call on him as long as I live.' I know, says he, now what course to take, if I be in any want, even to call upon him; and he calls upon others to do so too.

(4.) When, God having heard thy prayers upon solemn vows made by thee, thy heart is made careful to pay those vows which thou didst make in the time of thy suing to God for that mercy; this may be an argument to thee, the thing being granted, that thy prayer was heard. For—

First, It argueth that thy heart itself doth secretly make such an account, that upon them God did grant the thing, and thou doest therefore make conscience to return all again to God in service, as the condition of thy indentures made with him, and as a homage due, and an acknowledgment for ever that such a mercy was won by prayer; and by this preservest the memory of the receipt of that mercy, vows being of the nature of homage. And—

Secondly, In this also it is an evidence that the thing was obtained by prayer: in that God calls for those vows from thee, by his Spirit in thy heart, and stirs thee up to perform them, it argues that, in relation to thy prayers answered, he takes them as dues from thee; that having despatched thy suit, he now calls for what was agreed to be given him when it should be performed. And—

Thirdly, In that also he doth accept the payment of these thy vows of thee, he acknowledgeth that those vows and prayers were heard; for as Manoah* said in another case, Judges xiii. 23, 'If he meant to have destroyed us, he would not have accepted a sacrifice,' so in this case it may be said, if God had not heard thy prayers, he would not have accepted thy vows after thy praying. Thus David, Psalm lxvi. 13, 14, 'I will pay thee my vows, which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I was in my trouble.' The reason follows, ver. 17, 19, because that 'verily God hath heard me when I cried to him.' And so Eliphaz in Job doth connect and hang these two together, chap. xxii. 27, 'Thou shalt make thy prayer to him, and he shall hear thee, and thou shalt pay thy vows.' This which he speaks of paying his vows was not only as it was to be his duty, but also as a consequent that would follow the other,—that when his prayers should be heard, he thereupon would perform his vows; for his scope is to move Job to turn to God, shewing what benefit would accrue to him by it, and amongst others this, the hearing his prayers and performing his vows.

(5.) When thou art enabled by faith to see clearly God's hand shewed forth in the effecting of that mercy over and above the power of second causes, and to acknowledge it to his glory; for the truth is, one main cavil-

* Manoah's wife.—ED.

ling reason in our blind hearts, whereby we are usually hindered and put by from apprehending our prayers to be answered when yet the thing is done, we shall find to be, that our eyes are terminated and bounded in second causes, and not raised to see God's hand in the thing : therefore, on the contrary, when God enableth thee to see that he hath done thee this kindness, so as thy mind is clear in it, this is a fruit of his hearing thy prayers ; and this you will usually find to be true, that so much faith and dependence as you had upon God in prayer for the obtaining of a mercy, so much faith and acknowledgment you will have in the accomplishment of it. Parallel with this rule is that other, which in another case is usually given : that in performance of duties, so much as the soul did go out of itself to God for strength to perform them, so much, when they are performed, will the heart acknowledge God's assistance and be humbled. And this is a sign of prayer being heard upon this ground, because God's end of hearing prayers is that we 'might glorify him.' So, Ps. l. 15, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble : I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.' Therefore, when the heart hath prayed much for a mercy, with dependence before the obtaining of it, and then is enabled to exalt God when it is obtained, it is a sign that God did it in relation to those prayers. For there is that connexion made between these as between the cause and the effect : 'I will hear thee, and thou shalt glorify me.' David, when he was delivered out of all his troubles, as when he made that 18th Psalm he was, as appears by the title of it, then at the 6th verse he relates how he had prayed, and how he was heard : and see thereupon how his heart was enlarged to acknowledge God alone to have done all, in the rest of that psalm ; so from the 27th and also from the 31st verses. When we see angels from God, beyond the power of second causes, descending, it is a sign that prayers, as angels, first ascended, and obtained that mercy. Thus also the church, Isa. xxvi., having obtained those deliverances by prayer, ver. 17, (for which there she makes that song by way of thankfulness,) she ascribes all unto God : ver. 12, 'Thou hast wrought all our works for us ;' and, ver. 18, 'Verily we have not wrought any deliverance in the earth.'

(6.) When with the mercy there cometh the assurance of God's love, and an evidence of his favour ; when God sends not a bare token only, but a letter also with it, to bear witness of his love, in which the token is wrapt. I need not make that a sign, for when this comes with a mercy, it carries its own evidence ; you will then know well enough that it is the fruit of prayer.

(7.) Lastly, it will be evident by the event. Things obtained by prayer have few thorns in them, the curse is taken out ; but what comes but by ordinary providence comes as it were up of itself alone, and, like the earth untilld, is full of thorns and briars, and many vexations. The reason is, for what comes in by prayer comes as a blessing, and so no sorrow is added to it ; and also because prayer killeth those inordinate lusts which are the cause of that vanity and vexation which are in the things enjoyed. But when 'the blessing of God maketh rich, he addeth no sorrow with it,' Prov. x. 22. Things long deferred, at last obtained by prayer, prove most comfortable, and in a settled manner such ; they prove standing and stable blessings : and what trouble the heart was put to in the deferring, it is recompensed by the more settled, constant, unmixed sweetness in the enjoying ; prayer having long perfumed it, and the thing being steeped therein, it proves exceeding pleasant. So, Prov. xiii. 12, 'Hope deferred makes the heart sick ;' but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life, and heals that sickness, and abundantly

comforts the heart. Thus Isaac found Rebekah a great blessing, and a comfortable wife to him, Gen. xxiv. 67. Such a comfort also was Isaac to Abraham, Gen. xvii. 18, 19, 'a son indeed,' 'a son of laughter,' as his name signifies. And such was Samuel to Hannah; she had not only a son of him, but a good son, a blessed son, a prophet, and the judge of the people of God. Whereas Jacob getting the blessing, but without prayer, how embittered was it to him, though a blessing to him in the event, by twenty years' banishment from his mother's house! When Israel themselves set up a king, 'but not by me,' as God says, what a punishment was he to them! 'Given is wrath, and taken away in anger,' Hos. xiii. 11

CHAPTER IX.

Considerations to quiet the heart, and to help it to discern an answer to, and acceptance of, the prayer when the thing is not accomplished.

II. BUT now the next and more difficult question is, when the thing is not granted, how shall we then discern and know that God doth notwithstanding hear the prayer?

Concerning which I must premise this, that it is true that always the very thing itself desired is not granted, when yet the prayer is heard. Christ prayed 'the cup might pass from him,' which though some interpret the word *passing* for the short continuance of the brunt, and that therefore in that respect he was heard directly in what he asked; yet if so, why was that clause, 'if it be possible,' added? That argues his petition was for a total removal, yet with subjection to God's will, for he knew there was no great impossibility in a short removal of it; nay, it was impossible but that it should pass, Acts ii. 24. But, howsoever, it is plain in Moses, about his going into Canaan, Deut. iii. 26: 'I besought the Lord,' says he, ver. 23, 'and he was angry with me, and would not hear me,' ver. 26. Likewise, ere I come to resolve the case, an objection is also to be removed; which is—

Obj.—That if the Spirit of God doth make every faithful prayer in us,—as, Rom. viii. 26, it is said he doth, 'We know not what to pray for, but the Spirit helpeth our infirmities,' &c.; and he 'searcheth the deep things of God,' as it is said, 1 Cor. ii. 10,—that therefore he knowing that God will not grant such a thing, you may think that he should not stir up the heart to pray for that which God means to deny, but always guide the heart aright, and not let us err or miss in the things we pray for. To this, in brief, by way of answer:—

Ans. 1.—The Spirit makes not prayers in us always according to what God's secret will and foreknowledge is, but according to his revealed will to us, both in his word and in his providence, as things therein are presented to us, and do lie before our view, and so not always according to what he means to do, but according to what it is our duty to pray most for. For he concurs to assist us to pray, as he doth in preaching or using other such like means and ordinances, wherein though the Spirit know whom God means to convert, whom not, yet he assists us ministers in our spirits oftentimes as much to preach to those he means not to convert, as to those he means to convert; he dealing with us therein according to what is our duty, not according to what is his decree.

Ans. 2.—Again, secondly, that phrase helps to answer this, when he is said to 'help our infirmities;' and therefore not according to his own vast knowledge doth he frame our prayers, but so as he applies his assistance to our infirm, weak, and narrow apprehensions, and stirs up desires in us to such things as according to our knowledge we are in duty to conceive, and which by all we can see, by what is before us revealed in his providence, we

think to be most for our good and his glory ; and God accepts such desires as from us, but yet doth for us according to the largeness of his own love.

And so now to come to the case propounded, and therein unto helps to pacify and direct the heart about those prayers at which the things are not granted.

1. And, first, how didst thou frame thy prayer for that thing which is denied thee ? Didst thou pray for it absolutely and peremptorily, as simply best for thee ? Thou must not then think much if such a prayer be denied, for therein thou wentest beyond thy commission. But if thou didst pray for it conditionally, and with an *if*, as Christ did,—‘ if it be possible,’ (which instance is a strong ground for such kind of prayers,) and ‘ not my will, but thy will be done,’—so as thou didst refer it unto, and trust God’s judgment in the thing, and not thine own, only didst put him in mind, as thy duty was, of what was represented to thee as best for thee in view, and so left it to him to cast, and didst refer it to his will and wisdom ; then thy prayer may be most fully answered and heard, and yet the thing denied, and thou art to interpret and take God’s meaning and mind revealed in the event in the best sense, which way soever it falls ; for otherwise Christ had not been heard, when yet the text says ‘ he was heard in all he feared,’ Heb. v. 7.

2. Observe if there were not a reservation in that denial, for some greater and further mercy, whereof that denial was the foundation. Thus—

(1.) Oftentimes some great cross is prevented by the denial of a thing which we were urgent for. If we had had many of our desires, we had been undone. So it was a mercy to David that his child was taken away, for whose life he was yet so earnest, who would have been but a living monument of his shame. It was also a mercy to David that Absalom was taken away, —whom surely he prayed much for, for he loved him much,—who, if he had lived, might have been the ruin of him and his house. As a wicked man’s deliverance and the granting his request lays a foundation, and is a reservation of him to a worse judgment ; so the denial of a godly man’s prayer is for his greater good, and is laid as a foundation of a greater mercy. And again—

(2.) Oftentimes the very denial breaks a man’s heart, and brings him nearer to God, puts him upon searching into his ways and estate, and in his prayers to see what should be amiss therein ; which alone is a great mercy, and better than the thing, seeing by the loss of that one thing he learns how to pray better, and so to obtain a hundred better things afterward. Christ desired the cup might pass ; it did not, and that was the foundation of our salvation, and the way to his glory, he being to pass through that suffering into his glory. The woman that had the bloody issue, though she used many means, and haply prayers among the rest, and all in vain, yet none took effect ; that in the end she might come to Christ, and have both body and soul healed at once.

3. Observe if there be not a transmutation and a translation or turning of the thing desired into some other greater blessing of the same kind ; for God, all whose ways are mercy and truth to his people, doth improve, husband, and lay out the precious stocks of their prayers to the best advantage, in things whereby the greatest returns and gains may accrue. As old Jacob laid not his hands of blessing as Joseph would have guided them, but laid the right hand upon the younger son, whom Joseph did set at his left ; so often doth God take off his hand of blessing from the thing we prayed for, and lays and discovers it in another more for our good. And as God giving Isaac the power and privilege to bless a son, though Isaac intended it for

Esau, yet God unbeknown to him transmitted it to Jacob, yet so as the blessing was not lost. Thus is it in our prayers for blessings both upon ourselves and others. There is often a transmutation, never a frustration of them ; which may as truly and directly be called an answer to the prayer, as if a factor beyond sea, when the owner sends for such and such commodities, supposing them more vendible and advantageous, but the factor knowing the state of things and the prices, sends him over, instead of them, such as shall sell better and bring in more profit, may be said to answer his letters, and that better than if he had sent those very commodities he writ for. Thus Abraham's prayers for Ishmael were turned for Isaac ; David's for the child to Solomon.

4. Observe if in the end God doth not answer thee still according to the ground of thy prayer ; that is, see if that holy end, intention, and affection which thou hadst in prayer be not in the end fully satisfied, though not in the thing thou didst desire ; for God answers *secundum cardinem*, according to the hinge which the prayer turns upon. As when a general is sent out with an army by a king or a state, who give him many particular directions how to order and dispose and manage the war, although in many particulars that fall out, wherein they could not foresee to give so punctual and particular directions, he swerves from the directions, yet if he keeps to the intent of their commission, and doth what is most advantageous for their ends, he may be said to keep to his commission. For as they say of the law, *mens legis est lex*,—the mind of the law is the law, not the bare words it is printed in,—so the meaning of the Spirit is the prayer, Rom. viii. 27, and not simply the things desired, wherein we express those our desires. And still the meaning, the intent, the ground of our prayers shall be answered.

To open this : the main ends and meanings of our hearts in our requests are God's glory, the church's good, and our own particular comfort and happiness. We can desire but comfort ; and a man looketh out and spieth out such a particular mercy, which he thinketh tends much to God's glory and his happiness, and yet that thing is denied ; yet notwithstanding God will answer him according to the meaning of his prayers : his glory shall certainly be advanced, even for that prayer of his, some other way, and his comfort made up, which is the common desire of all mankind. And thou canst have but comfort, let the thing be what it will that conveys it to thee. And God will take order that that comfort thy soul desired thou shalt have come in one way or other, which, when it doth, thou canst not but say thy prayers are heard. For as God fulfils his promises, so he hears prayers ; there is the same reason of both. Now God hath promised, 'He that leaves father and mother shall have a hundred-fold.' Not in specie, as we say : in kind this cannot always be fulfilled, for a hundred fathers he cannot have. God fulfils it not therefore always in the same kind, but in some other things, which shall be more than a hundred fathers would be.

Moses prays he might go into Canaan : God answers the ground of his prayer, though not in the matter in it expressed and desired, and that both for Moses's comfort and his own glory ; for he takes him up into heaven, the true Canaan, whereof that Canaan was but a type ; and he appoints Joshua, a fresh and a young man,* coming on in the world, and one whom Moses

* It is by a very common inadvertence supposed that Joshua was a young man when he was appointed to succeed Moses as leader of the hosts of Israel. Yet he was general of the army in fighting against Amalek, nearly forty years before this. At that time he could scarcely be under thirty-five years of age, and by many he is supposed to have been fifty-three at the Exodus. At the time of his appointment, then, he must have been at the least seventy-five, and may have been ninety-three.—ED.

himself had tutored and brought up, and was his pupil, servant, and attendant, Num. xi. 28. And this was more for God's glory, for Joshua was therein to be the type of Christ leading us to heaven, which the law, of which Moses was the type, could not bring us unto, by reason of the weakness of it; and he being young did it better; and it was not so much also for God's glory that one man should do all: and whereas Moses desired to have the honour of it, in that his servant that attended him, and had been brought up by him, and had all from him, that he was the man should do it, was well-nigh as great an honour to Moses as if he had been the leader himself. And so David, when he desired to build the temple and a house to God, for the like reasons God denied it, but yet honoured him to prepare the materials, and to draw the pattern, as also in that his son did it, who was therein also the like type of Christ, being a prince of peace, but David a man of blood and war; and likewise God accepted this of David, as if he had built it, and will recompense him as much.

5. Observe if in the thing which thou hast prayed much about, though it be denied thee, yet if God doth not endeavour to give thee (as I may so speak) all satisfaction that may be, even as if he were tender of denying thee, and therefore doth much in it for thy prayers' sake, though the conclusion proves otherwise, as being against some other purpose of his for some other ends: as when he denied Moses to go into the land of Canaan, he did it with much respect (as I may so speak with reverence) to Moses. He yielded as far as might be, for he let him lead them till he should come to the very borders; and he let him see that good land, carrying him up to a hill, and, as it is thought, by a miracle enabled his sight to view the whole land. And the man he chose to perform this work was his servant, which was a great honour to Moses, that one brought up by him should succeed him. So when Abraham prayed for Ishmael, 'O let Ishmael live in thy sight!' Gen. xvii. 18, God went as far in granting his request as might be; for, says he, ver. 20, 'I have heard thee; and I have blessed him, and I will make him fruitful, and multiply him exceedingly, and he shall beget twelve princes: but my covenant I will establish with Isaac.' So likewise, when in casting that thing thou didst seek at his hands, he shews an extraordinary hand in turning it, it is a sign he had a respect to thee, that he would vouchsafe to discover his hand so much in it. Let the thing fall which way it will, if God's hand appear much in it, thou mayest comfortably conclude that there is some great thing in it, and that prayer wrought that miracle in it to dispose it so; and that there is some great reason why he denies thee, and a great respect had to thy prayers, in that he is pleased to discover so extraordinary a providence about it.

6. Lastly, look into the effect of that denial upon thine own heart; as—

(1.) If thy heart be enlarged to acknowledge God to be holy and righteous in his dealings with thee, and thine own unworthiness the cause of his denying thee. Thus we often find the saints expressing themselves in their prayers. That Ps. xxii., though typically made of Christ, yet as it was penned by David, and as it may concern his person, it may serve for an instance for this: 'I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not;' this might have made him jealous of God, but says he, 'Thou art holy,' &c., and dealest now with me in a holy manner, and art just in it. Others 'have called on thee,' and have been heard, though I now for my unworthiness am denied; 'but I am a worm.' It might have put a man off when he should think others are heard, but not I; but it puts not him off, but humbles him: 'I am a worm,' &c., and 'Thou art holy.'

(2.) If God fill thy heart with a holy contentment in the denial ; if he speak to thy heart, as he did to Moses when he denied him, Deut. iii. 28, ' Let it suffice thee ; ' if as to St Paul, when he was so earnest about removing that buffeting, if thou gettest but such an answer as that to him, ' My grace is sufficient,' or that some such like consideration is dropped in that stays thee. It was the effect of David's seven days' fasting that he did so contentedly bear the loss of the child, which his servants thought would have overwhelmed him, 2 Sam. xii. 19-21. But a consideration was dropped in, which was the fruit of his prayer, ' that he should go to him, not he return hither ; ' and his mind was comforted thereby, insomuch, as it is said, ver. 24, that ' he comforted Bathsheba also.'

(3.) If thou canst be thankful to God out of faith, that God hath cast and ordered all for the best, though he hath denied thee ; and although thou seest no reason but that the thing prayed for would have been for the best, yet art thankful upon the denial of it, out of faith resting in God's judgment in it, as David in all those forementioned places was : ' Thou art holy that inhabitest the praises of Israel ; ' he praises God for all this. David, before he did eat, after his seven days' fasting for the child, arose, ' and went first into the temple, and worshipped,' 2 Sam. xii. 20 ; and of what kind of worship it was appears by his anointing himself and changing his raiment, which was in token of rejoicing and thanksgiving ; and it fell out to him according to his faith, for presently after Solomon was begotten, ver. 24.

(4.) If thou canst pray still, and givest not over, although thou standest for mercies which thou missest ; if when thou hast mercies granted thou fearest most, and when denied lovest most, and art not discouraged, thy prayers are heard. Ps. lxxx. 4, though God seemed angry with their prayers, yet they pray, and expostulate with him, and give not over, for they made that psalm as a prayer, ' And how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people ? ' So, Ps. xliv. 17, ' Though we are cast among dragons, yet we have not been false in thy covenant.' So say thou, I will pray still, though I never have an answer in this life. It moves ingenuous natures to see men take repulses and denials well, which proud persons will not do : and so it moves God.

CHAPTER X.

Application: a reproof of those that pray, but look not after the return of their prayers.—The causes of this neglect.

THE use of all is to reprove those who put up prayers, and are earnest in begging, but look not after them when they have done, no more than if they had not prayed; who still venture, and have a great stock of prayers going, but look not after the returns that are made, cast not up their comings in and gainings by prayers; and when they have prayed, sit down discouraged, as not making account in earnest that ever they shall hear of their prayers again, even as if they had been but as words cast away, 'as beating the air,' as 'bread cast upon the waters,' which they think sinks or is carried away, and they shall find it no more. But herein you despise God's ordinance, and err, not knowing the power of prayers; and ye condemn the Lord. But you will say as they in the prophet said, 'Wherein do we condemn him?' If you asked a man a question, and when you had done did turn your back upon him, as scoffing Pilate asked in scorn of Christ, 'What is truth?' but would not stay for an answer, did you not condemn him? As not to answer when a question is asked you is contempt, so not to regard the answer made, when you have been earnest in begging, is no less contempt also. If you had written letters to a very friend about important business, and had earnestly solicited him for an answer, and he were careful in due time to send one, if you should make account to hear of him no more, should you not wrong him in your thoughts? Or if he did write, if you should not vouchsafe to read over his answer, were it not a contempt of him? So is it here, when you have been earnest with God for blessings, and regard not the answer. And because verily this is a fault among us, I will therefore endeavour to discover to you the causes and discouragements, which, though they keep you not from praying, yet from this earnest expectation, and real and true making account to hear of answers of your prayers. Only my scope is not to shew you so much the reasons why God denies you many requests, as why even in your own hearts you are discouraged after you have prayed, as if they would not be answered, although God doth answer them. These discouragements are partly temptations, partly sinful impediments, wherein we are more faulty.

1. Because your assurance that your persons are accepted is weak, therefore your confidence that your prayers are heard is weak also. For as God doth first accept the person, and then our prayers; so the belief that God doth accept our persons is that which also upholds our hearts in confidence that our prayers shall be granted. This you may find in 1 John v. 13-15: in the 13th verse he says, 'These things have I written to you, that ye may know you have eternal life;' and upon that assurance this will follow, ver. 14, 15, 'And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any-

thing according to his will, he hears us,' &c. ; 'and if we know he hears us, we know we have the petitions we desired of him.' Mark how he links these three together, as effects and consequences each of other. (1.) 'These things I write unto you, that you may be assured that life and heaven is yours,' as in the 12th and 13th verses. And upon that, (2.) this confidence will follow in your hearts, 'that God hears you,'—that is, that you have his ears open to you, and his heart enlarged towards you. And then, (3.) if you be assured that God hears you, then from this will follow an assurance that you shall have anything granted you desire. Yea, and he makes this one of the main and immediate effects of assurance of justification ; therefore he says, 'this is the confidence that we have in him,'—that is, this effect there is of this confidence. For whereas they might say, What benefit will accrue to us by this assurance ? Why this, says he, which is one of the great and main privileges of a Christian, even assurance that God will hear him ; and not only so, but grant him all his prayers. For when a man is assured God hath given him his Son, he will then easily be induced to believe and expect, 'How shall he not with him give me all things ?' Rom. viii. 32. If once he looks upon God as a father, he will then easily conceive that which Christ says, 'If fathers that are evil can give good things to their children, how much more shall not your Father give his Spirit and all good things to them that ask them ?' And if he gave his Son when we did not pray to him, how much more shall he not with him give us all things we pray for ? If a man comes to sue to any man whose mind he knew not, whether he loved him or not, he would have small hope or expectation of having his suit granted, though he came again and again ; but if he be assured he is in favour with him, according to that degree of favour he supposeth himself to stand in with him, he is assured and confident of obtaining his request.

2. Discouragement is the weakness of their prayers. Though a man thinks his person is accepted ; yet, Alas ! says he, my prayers are so poor and weak, as surely God will never regard them.

(1.) To remove which, let me first ask thee this question, Dost thou pray with all thy might ? Then though that thy might be weak in itself, and in thine own apprehension such, yet because it is all the might which thou hast, and which grace hath in thee, it shall be accepted. 'For God accepts according to what a man hath, and not according to that he hath not,' 2 Cor viii. 12.

(2.) Thou art to consider that God doth not hear thee for thy prayers' sake, though not without them, but 'for his name's sake,' and his 'Son's sake,' and because thou art his child ; as the mother when her child cries, suppose it be a weak child, doth not neglect to hear and relieve it, but tenders it, not because it doth cry more loud, but because it cries, and pities it the more the weaker it is.

(3.) Again, though the performance in itself be weak, yet considered as a prayer, it may be strong, because a weak prayer may set the strong God a-work. As faith for the act of it, as produced by us, may be weak, yet because its object is Christ, therefore it justifies : so is it in prayer ; it prevails, not because of the performance itself, but because of the name which it is put up in, even Christ's name. And therefore, as a weak faith justifies, so a weak prayer prevails as well as a stronger ; and both for the like reason in both, for faith attributes all to God, and so doth prayer : for as faith is merely a receiving grace, so prayer a begging grace. And therefore dost thou think thy prayers are accepted at all, notwithstanding their weakness ? If that they are accepted, then they must be accepted as prayers. Now if

they be accepted as prayers, then as effectual motives to prevail with God to grant the thing you ask; for if he should not accept them to that end for which they were ordained, it is as if he accepted them not at all. As, therefore, when he approves of any man's faith as true and sincere, he approves and accepts of it to that purpose for which it was ordained, which is to save and justify, and to this end doth as fully accept the weakest act of faith as the strongest; so is it with their prayers, which being ordained as a means to obtain mercies from him, if he accepts them at all, it is with relation to the accomplishment of them, which is their end.

(4.) Men are mistaken in judging of the weakness of their prayers. They judge of the weakness of their prayers by their expressions, and gifts in performing them, or by the stirring and overflow of affections; whereas the strength and vigour of prayer should be estimated from the faith, the sincerity, the obedience, the desires expressed in it. As it is not the loudness of a preacher's voice, but the weight and holiness of the matter, and spirit of the preacher, that move a wise and an intelligent hearer; so not gifts, but graces in prayers are they that move the Lord. The strength of prayer lies not in words, but in that it is fitted to prevail with God. One prayer is not more strong than another, further than it is so framed as it hath power with God more or less; as of Jacob it is said, 'He had power with God,' Hos. xii. Now prayers move God, not as an orator moves his hearers, but as a child moves his father. Two words of a child humbled, and crying at his father's feet, will prevail more than penned orations, Rom. viii. : it is the meaning of the spirit that God looks unto, more than the expression; for the groans there are said to be unutterable. Hezekiah's expressions were so rude and broken, that he says, Isa. xxxviii. 14, that he did but 'chatter,' he being then sick, 'even as a crane;' yet God heard them.

3. A third discouragement is failings of answers : I have prayed often and long, and I have been seldom or never answered, and therefore I make little account of my prayers that they are heard; others have the revenues of their prayers coming in, but I do miss whatsoever almost I stand for. Therefore say they as those, 'Why have we fasted and thou regardedst it not?' Isa. lviii. 3.

To remove this, consider—

(1.) That thou hast the more reason to wait, for thou hast the more answers to come; for as wicked men treasure up wrath, so do godly men mercy, and especially by their prayers: and therefore mercies and answers do often come thick together, even as afflictions also do.

(2.) Suppose thou shouldst have few answers concerning the things thou seekest for here, either in praying for thyself or others, yet thy reward is with the Lord. It is in praying as in preaching, a man may preach faithfully many a year, and yet not convert a soul, and yet a man is not to give over waiting, but to observe after every sermon what good is done, and whether 'God will give men repentance,' as it is, 2 Tim. ii. 25. And if none be converted, yet, as Isa. xlix. 4, 'a man's reward is with the Lord.' 'Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour,' 1 Cor. iii. 8; and not according to the success of his labour only. So it is in praying: though thou missest again and again, and nothing succeeds thou prayest for, yet be not discouraged, for thy reward is with the Lord, which will come in one day.

(3.) God doth it, not that he hears thee not, but to try thee. For a man to say as David says, Ps. cxvi. 1, 2, 'God hath heard my prayer, therefore I

will call upon him as long as I live;' that is nothing so much as to be able to say, Well, I have prayed thus long, and for these many things, and never sped, and yet I will call upon him whilst I live, though I find no answer in this life. To find comings in in a trade, and yet to hold out trading still, argues not so much faithfulness in a man's calling, as when a man hath losses, and castings behindhand, and yet to follow it.

(4.) God usually stays so long that we have done expecting: Luke xviii. 8, 'The elect cry day and night,' but God stays so long, ver. 7, that when he comes he finds not faith, they have done expecting, have forgot their prayers, and then he doth things they looked not for, Isa. lxiv. 3.

Other discouragements there are wherein we ourselves are more faulty, and which are our sins more than our temptations, which yet weaken the expectation of having our prayers answered: as—

1. Slothfulness in prayer, when we do not put to all our might in praying; and then no wonder we do not only not obtain, but that our own hearts misgive us, that we look for little success and issue of such prayers: *qui frigide rogat, docet negare*,—he that shews himself cold in a suit, teaches him he sues to deny him. If we see one seeking to us faintly and slightly, we are not then solicitous to deny him, but think he will be easily put off, and not think much; so accordingly when we shall observe so much by ourselves, and see ourselves slothful in praying, and praying as if we prayed not, no wonder if by reason of that consciousness we look not after the success of such prayers, which in the performance we slighted, when we pray as if we were willing to be denied, we knowing that the Scripture says that the fervent prayer only prevails, that prayer which is *ἐνεργουμένη*, that sets all the faculties on work, James v. 16. How should we then expect that God should grant any good thing to us? For though God sells nothing to us for our prayers, but gives freely, yet he would have his gifts accepted; now without large desires and longings they would not be accepted. And what is fervent prayer but the expression of such fervent desires? Jacob wrestled when he obtained. 'Many seek to enter,' says Christ, 'but you must strive.'

Now when we know these things and yet are slothful, how can we expect any answers at all? Will not the consciousness of it quell all our expectations? And hence it comes to pass that God, proportioning his dealings with us to our prayers, because we seem to pray, and yet pray not to purpose; therefore God sometimes seems like one asleep, and then sometimes to wake, and make fair offers to help, and yet falls as it were asleep again, because we were thus drowsy in our prayers. Those prayers that awaken God must awaken us; those prayers that stir God must 'stir us to lay hold on God,' as Isaiah speaks. As obedience strengthens faith and assurance, so fervency in prayer begets confidence of being heard. In all other things slothfulness doth discourage and weaken expectation. Doth any man expect that riches should come upon him when he doth his business negligently? For 'it is the diligent hand that maketh rich.' Doth any man expect a crop and a harvest if he take not pains to plough and sow his corn? No more, if you do not take pains with your hearts in prayer, can you expect an answer, or indeed will you.

2. A second cause, or sinful discouragement herein, is looking at prayer only as a duty to be performed, and so performing it as a task, and not so much out of desires stirred up after the things to be obtained, nor out of faith that we shall obtain them; which is as if a physician having a sick

servant, to whom he prescribeth, and commandeth to take some physic to cure him, and his man should take it indeed because it is commanded and prescribed by his master, looking at it as an act of duty, as he obeys him in other businesses, but not as looking at it as a medicine or means that will have any work upon him to cure him, and therefore orders himself as if he had taken no such thing. Thus do most in the world pray to God; take prayer as a prescription only, but not as a means. They come to God daily, but as to a master only in this performance, not as to a father; and thus doing, no wonder if they look for little effect of prayers, for our expectation never exceeds nor reaches further than our end and intention which we had in any business. If I perform any ordinance but as a duty, then I rest therein and expect no further; as if a man preacheth for filthy lucre only, he performs his duty and then looks for his hire, but looks not after any other effect of his sermons: so nor will men do after their prayers for answers to them, when they perform them as duties only. Now, to help you in this, you are to look to two things in prayer: *first*, to a command from God; *secondly*, to the promise of God; and so to consider it in a double relation, first, as a duty, in respect to the command; *secondly*, as a means to obtain or procure blessings at God's hand, in relation to his promises. Therefore, in prayer, first an act of obedience, *secondly* an act of faith, is to be exercised: 'Ask in faith, nothing wavering,' James i. Now the most in the world perform it as an act of obedience only, and so rest in the present performance and acceptance of it; but if a man pray in faith, he will pray with an eye to the promises, and look on prayer as a means, for time to come, to obtain such or such a mercy at God's hands: and if so, then he is not satisfied till he hath an answer of his prayers, and till then will wait, as the church says, 'she would wait till he did arise and plead her cause.'

3. A third sinful discouragement is returning to sins after prayers. When a man hath prayed for some mercy, and riseth full of much confidence that his prayers are heard, and so a while he walks, yet falling into a sin, that sin doth dash all his hopes, undoes his prayers, as he thinks, and calls them back again—meets, as it were, with the answer, which is God's messenger, and causeth it to return to heaven again. How often when God had even granted a petition, and the decree was a-coming forth, and the grant newly written, and the seal a-setting to it, but an act of treason coming between, stops it in the seal and defers it, blots and blurreth all, both prayer and grant, when newly written, and leaves a guilt in the mind which quells our hopes, and then we look no more after our prayers. And this especially if, when we were a-sinuing, such a thought came in, (as often it doth to restrain us,) Are you not in dependence upon God for such a mercy, and have prayed for it, and are fair for it? how then dare you do this, and sin against him? When in this case the heart goes on, this blots all the prayer, and discourageth a man; for, saith the conscience, will God hear sinners? as he said.

And thus far it is true that sinning thus between interrupts and hinders the obtaining our petitions: that answerably as we do thus dash and betray and undo our prayers, so in a proportion we find, in the way to our obtaining the thing we prayed for, so many rubs and difficulties do arise; for as we lay blocks in God's way coming towards us to do us good, so he in ours; therefore, often when a business goes prosperously on, and we think we shall carry it, comes some accident between the cup and the lip, that casts all behindhand again, because answerably we dealt with God. For when we had

prayed, and were encouraged and in good hopes, then by some sin or other we spoiled all, and bereaved ourselves of our expectation. But yet this you are to consider, that as in the end praying useth to overcome sin in God's children, so also God in the end overcomes difficulties, and brings the matter to pass. And know it is not sins past so much that hinder the prayers of God's people, as the present unfitness and indisposition of their hearts for mercy.

TIDINGS OF PEACE,

TO BE SPOKEN TO CONSCIENCES DISTRESSED.

God will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints, &c.—

PSALM LXXXV. 8.

THE main thing intended to be insisted upon out of these words is despatched; yet, that I may not leave so fair and fruitful a crop still standing upon the ground unreaped, I will go on more briefly to have in the rest of that harvest the text affords.

This psalm, as was said, was penned as a prophecy of, and prayer for, the return of God's people out of the captivity of Babylon, and the settling and establishment of that church and state upon its former basis; yet so as therein there is a further and more especial aim had to the peace and glory to be brought in by Christ, till when this prophecy otherwise had but a poor and slender accomplishment, in regard of much outward glory or peace that that church enjoyed.

And therefore the peace here spoken of and promised for the present is to be extended largelier than to outward prosperity, or a happy issue out of that calamity; even to speaking peace to drooping and weather-beaten consciences. And accordingly we find this kind of peace to have been specially promised by the prophet Isaiah to the people at their return out of the captivity, both in chap. xlviii. 20–22, and chap. lvii. 14–21; there being many broken hearts that had wanted the light of God's countenance long, having been during the captivity banished from the ordinances of the temple, hanging up their harps mourning, whose thoughts were as if God had meant to destroy them,—as appears Jer. xxix. 11,—who afterwards were refreshed with inward peace at the restoration of those ordinances, as well as with outward, as by those places doth appear. Therefore in relation to this kind of peace only I will at this time handle the words.

In the words you have a discovery of God's proceedings in treating of peace or proclaiming war with his people and subjects.

1. You see that sometimes God doth not speak peace to his own children. This was their state for the present, when this psalm was penned: 'He will speak peace;' therefore, at present he did not. Yea, it may incline us to think that God at present spake the contrary; for the prophet speaks this by faith, as contrary to sense and present experience: he believes God in-

tends to come again to a treaty of peace, though now he seems to have nothing but anger, and blood, and war in his looks, speeches, and actions; and to threaten and proclaim war and take up arms against them. And thus God often deals with his own children, whether a people or a particular man: so with a nation, Isa. lxiii. 10, 'They rebelled, and he fought against them;' so with a particular man, God frowned upon and rated his child Ephraim, 'and spake bitter things against him,'—it is the phrase used, Jer. xxxi. 20,—though yet 'Ephraim is my pleasant child,' says he. David had not a good word from him a long time: Ps. li. 8, 'Make me to hear again, of joy and gladness;' and, Ps. l. 7, 'Hear, O my people, and I will speak;' (but not against them, they might hope, because he owns them for his people;) 'Hear, O Israel, and I will testify against thee;' and yet it follows, 'I am the Lord thy God.' Job says he did not speak only against them, but also 'wrote bitter things;' he wrote, as it were, books against him, chap. xiii. 26, he writing over in his conscience the sins of his youth in letters of blood, and wrath and terrors for them.

2. There must needs be some great reason for this, they being his people; which is the second thing that is intimated, and may be observed out of these words: namely, the reason or moving cause provoking God thus to interrupt the peace of his people. They had fallen into some gross folly or other; some sinful, inordinate dispositions had been indulged unto and nourished in them; which is usually, though not always, the cause of this his dealing. This is evident by this, that the conclusion of their peace, when it is made up again, hath this clause, as the only article of reconciliation between them, that 'they return no more to folly;' implying they had formerly run out into some inordinacy, which to reduce them from, God had took up arms against them, and thereby taught them wisdom to take heed of losing, and then buying peace at so dear a rate again. And, indeed, all the quarrels that God hath against a nation, a particular place or person that belongs to him, do begin there: 'They rebelled, and he fought against them,' Isa. lxiii. 10; 'For the iniquity of his covetousness I was wroth,' Isa. lvii. 17.

Reason.—The reason is, for anger is out of love, as well as hatred; which therefore he expresseth, though with grief, he should be put to quarrel with those he hath set himself to love. And as wicked men, whom he always hates, may out of his patience have a truce; so, on the contrary, with his own, God may take up a quarrel; yet he loves them, and remembers them with everlasting kindness.

The uses of both are these:—

Use 1.—As peace with God is dear to you, so to take heed of turning unto folly. Only take this advertisement, that they are not mere follies or ignorances that do interrupt or break the peace. As it is not simply the outrage of some pirates that will cause two states at peace to enter into a war, unless that state consent to their act, and maintain them in their rapine; so it is not simply the rising of lusts that 'war in our members against the law of the mind,' that breaks the peace between God and us, unless they be approved of and consented unto, nourished and maintained with some presumption. Whilst we maintain and take up a constant fight against God's enemies in us, and disavow the outrageous risings of our lusts, the peace may hold, and often doth; for whilst we are not at peace with sin, God may be at peace with us and our spirits; but so much peace as we give them, so much war God takes up.

Use 2.—The second use is: Doth God take up quarrels against his own?

Then, upon any breach made, go forth to meet him. It is St Paul's exhortation, 'not to let the sun go down upon thy wrath,' but to reconcile thyself ere night with thy offended brother; but I turn the exhortation, 'Let not the sun go down upon God's wrath' towards thee; but every day make and renew thy peace with God, ere thou sleepest, that, as David says, 'thou mayest lie down and sleep in peace,' Ps. iv. 8.

Use 3.—The third use: If the peace of God's own people be thus often interrupted, who yet are 'the sons of peace,' Luke x. 6, what wrath is reserved for the 'children of disobedience,' Eph. ii. 2, and open rebels, that are children of wrath because of disobedience? 'There is no peace to the wicked, says my God,' Isa. lvii. God is a-preparing against thee, whoever thou art, that goest on in sin, 'if thou turn not,' Ps. vii. 12; thou art pressed for hell, and art thither bound, to encounter with the wrath of the great God, thither where no truce is to be had: 'There is no discharge in that war,' as Solomon says, Eccles. viii. 8. Think of this, you that sin, and will sin; whose peace is not struck up between God and you, who never yet so much as entered into any treaty of peace with God, who never apprehended God and yourselves at odds.

3. The third thing to be observed out of the text is this: That when the child of God wants peace, he can have no peace till God speak it. God must speak peace if ever his people have it; therefore, says he here, 'I will hear what God will speak.' He speaks in opposition to the voice of man and the help of second causes, and of all means whatever, which in time of distress of themselves can do no good.

Reason 1.—Because God is the king of all the world, the sovereign Lord of all. Now treaties of war and peace are the prerogative of kings, and of them alone: they may consult with their subjects about establishing good laws, as they use to do, &c.; but the proclaiming war and peace with foreign states they have ever held in their own hands; and so doth God, who is the King of kings.

Reason 2.—Because God is the judge of all the world, and the party offended, at whose suit all the arrests and controversies do come. Now when a condemned man stands at the bar, let all the standers-by say what they will, bid him be of good comfort, and tell him that his cause will go well, yet till he hear the judge himself speak as much, he cannot be at rest in his mind; the judge only can acquit him and absolve him. The king alone speaks pardons; and so doth God peace. All afflictions are his arrests; thou must therefore make thy peace with him, if thou wilt be at peace.

Reason 3.—Peace, especially of conscience, is a thing must be created, for our hearts of themselves are full of nothing but turmoil, as the raging sea, which cannot rest. 'I create the fruits of the lips, Peace,' Isa. lvii. 19; men may speak it, but I must create it. A word of power, such as went forth when light was created, must go forth from God, or else there is no peace; for otherwise our hearts are as the sea, that rests not.

Reason 4.—The wounds of conscience which are in God's people are of that quality that none but God can cure them; for the chief thing that wounds them is the loss of God's favour, not simply his wrath. For it is the glory of God and his favour, not self-love only, that makes them seek him; therefore nothing gives peace but the restoring of his favour and the light of his countenance; the same dart that wounded must heal again: Isa. lvii., 'I smote him, and I will heal him.' And as one that is sick with love, when love is the disease, no physic, no persuasion of friends can cure it, nothing but only the love of the party beloved; so when a soul is wounded

for the loss of God's love, not all the things in the world can cure the heart ; but one word from him, one good look, one promise from him that we are his, stills all, and only can give peace. Like to a poor child that cries for its mother ; let who will dandle it, and play with it, and use it never so kindly, yet it will not be stilled till the mother comes ; so it is with a poor soul that cries after God day and night.

Use 1.—In case thou art in distress, especially of spirit, and want of peace of conscience, wait upon God in the use of means for peace. Friends may come to thee, and say, Why shouldst thou be troubled ? Thou hast no such cause to be cast down. But all these are 'miserable comforters,' as Job said, unless God speaks peace. David heard by the prophet Nathan that his sin was pardoned, but yet his soul was not at quiet till God would second it immediately by his Spirit ; therefore, says he, when Nathan had been with him, Ps. li. 8, 'Make me to hear of joy and gladness.' Art thou baited with hellish blasphemies cast into thy soul ? God must speak peace, and rebuke Satan for thee, and take him off thee ; all thy friends, all the men in the world cannot do it ; they can only say, as the archangel said, 'The Lord rebuke thee.' And he can as easily do it as he did rebuke Laban, and forbade him speaking roughly to Jacob ; the same charge he can give in an instant to Satan : therefore wait upon God, and look up to him.

Use 2.—Consider this against the time you come to die : all your desire is to die in peace ; and, 'Oh, let thy servant depart in peace !' is the speech and desire of all. But who is it that must speak peace to you then ? God only. At death you will send for a good minister, or a good friend, to give you some comfort, as you call it ; but if God will not speak it, how can they ? If you could call all the angels out of heaven, and all the saints both in earth and heaven, and so could have all that whole college of physicians about you, and they should desire to comfort you with all their cordials ; yet if God will not speak it, who is able to do it ? Job xxxiv. 29, 'If he hides his face, who can behold him ?' None can shew his face, as the opposition in the next words shews. False daubers may come to you, and say 'Peace, peace,' as they in the prophet said ; but listen what God will speak, he only must and can do it ; and be sure you make sure of him before you come to die. Would any wise prince defer the treaty of peace with his enemy till he come into the field, and when the battle is begun ? How foolish then are those who neglect seeking after God till the assault of death comes, and the king of fears, with all his terrors, hath encompassed them round !

4. The fourth observation is : That let God's people be in never so great distress, yet it is an easy thing for God to give peace to them. Mark the expression here used : it is but 'speaking' peace ; that is, it is as easy for him to give peace as it is for you to speak a word ; it is no more to him. Then our comfort is, that as he only must do it, so he easily can do it, even with a word.

Reason 1.—Because his speaking is creating ; if he speaks, he makes things to be, even with a word. As at first he did but say, 'Let there be light, and there was light ;' so still, if he but say, 'Let there be peace,' there is peace ; he made all, and upholds all by the word of his power. As therefore, when the storm was at its height, and the waves most raging, yet at one word of Christ's they were all still,—'The sea and the winds obey him,'—so when temptations are most fierce, and the doubts of thine own mind most tumultuous and raging, a word from him can still them.

Reason 2.—Secondly, because the light which God gives to a man's spirit

when he speaks peace is a sure and infallible light, and therefore a satisfying light, so as when it comes it must needs give peace, and no objection, no temptation can darken or obscure it when it shines. 'If he give quietness, who can trouble?' says he, in Job xxxiv. 29. No creature is able to separate from his love, or the assurance of it.

(1.) It is a certain and infallible light which God gives when he speaks peace. 'The anointing from above, which enlighteneth a man's eyes, is truth, and is no lie,' 1 John ii. 27; that is, in teaching a man,—of which he there speaks, not only what he is in himself, but what he is in teaching us,—he doth it so as a man is not deluded by it, and therefore it is added, 'None else need teach him:' for did the Spirit, when he did speak peace, speak so as that that man to whom it is spoken did not infallibly apprehend it, he should speak in vain; for so the Apostle reasons in case of unknown tongues, that if a trumpet give an uncertain sound, or a man speak so as it shall not be known what he speaks, 'he beats the air,' 1 Cor. xiv. 9. Now therefore, surely God, when he speaks peace, speaks it so infallibly and distinctly that the soul knows the meaning of it; it is not a voice else, for, says the Apostle there, ver. 10, 'The end of all voices is to signify;' and therefore, 'If I know not the meaning of the voice, he shall be as a barbarian that speaks to me,' ver. 11, especially when the speaker undertakes to be a witness, as the Holy Ghost, in speaking peace, is, 1 John v. 6. Now to witness is such a testimony as is taken for infallible, for the end of it is to put an end to the controversy, and it ends the strife between man and man; now the Holy Ghost, when he speaks, speaks as a witness, and therefore puts an end to a man's doubts: he speaks infallibly.

(2.) And therefore, in the second place, it is a satisfying light also; it is such a light as dispels darkness, as answers all objections, and so speaks peace home. As in a question and controversy in divinity or logic, when some one bottom truth is understood, a man hath a light which goes through all the objections, and answers them all; such a light doth the Spirit give to a poor distressed soul, about the great controversy of his own salvation, when he doth speak peace: he gives such a light as satisfies the mind, as lets him see *that* in God's free grace, and in Christ, which doth answer to all he or all the devils can say against him, from what wants or objections are in himself. He openeth, and no man nor devil is able to shut. And therefore, when he doth speak peace, his testimony is taken and believed: 'If we receive the witness of men, and rest in it,' 1 John v. 9, 'the witness of God is greater;' that is, of more power and efficacy to persuade and satisfy the soul.

Use 1.—The first use is a use of comfort to poor souls that are in distress, and in such distress sometimes, as they think and say their case is desperate and past recovery; so far are their souls sometimes shot into despair. Consider how easy it is for you to have your condition altered and changed, even in a moment. I tell thee, though, it may be, thou hast been cast down this twenty years, and thy soul is battered, broken, hardened, settled, fixed in serious thoughts of thy ruin and reprobation, yet one good look, one good word from God, shall in an instant dispel all, alter thy conceit and apprehension clean. God can and doth often more with one word, in one moment, than Satan could do in many years, with all the objections he could muster up. The truth of this, in experience, we often find and observe in ourselves and others. Yea, and sometimes when he doth speak peace, he gives such satisfaction to a man's soul in that particular, that he would be content to be as many years more in his spiritual conflicts to enjoy but the like light

one half hour. Thus easy is it for God to speak peace. Though thou thinkest thyself never so far off from peace, yet he can speak peace to them that are afar off, as well as those who are near; as himself says, Isa. lvii. 19, for, says he, it is I that speak it. And when he doth it, then all thy doubts and distresses will be forgotten, as the pains of a woman in travail are when a man-child is born.

Use 2.—Secondly, is the church in any distress? (as the church here at this time was,) he can redeem it out of all with a word. A word spoken to Cyrus's heart did set them in their own land again; so you have it expressed, Isa. xlv. 26–28, 'The God that saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited; and to the cities of Judah, Ye shall be built.' You see his manner of doing it, it is but with a word speaking; 'he says to Jerusalem, Be built.' And though there be never so great impediments in the way, he will say to the deep, Be dry, that his people may pass over; he dried up a whole nation, a sea of people, namely, the Babylonians, to make way for this deliverance. And when they are conquered, and Cyrus, a new king, comes to have the sway of things, God speaks to his heart also: 'That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and causeth him to say to Jerusalem, Be thou built.' Therefore go to him, and trust in him in all the distresses of the church, as the church also did, Ps. xlv. 4, 'Thou art my King, command deliverances;' a mandamus from God doth it, and will do it at any time.

5. Let God be never so angry, and his people's distress never so great, yet he will speak peace in the end to his people. You heard before, that if we have peace, he only must give it; and then, that he could and was able with ease to do it: and now you shall hear that he will certainly do it in the end.

The reasons the text suggests are these:—

Reason 1.—If we consider but who this God is that is to speak peace, 'I will hear what God the Lord will speak;' he is the Lord, and therefore able to speak what pleaseth him; he is peculiarly 'the God of peace,' and therefore willing to speak peace. Now, (1.) when it is said he is the 'God of peace, and the God of comfort,' the meaning is, he is full of it, infinitely full of it, and 'out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.' Thoughts of peace and love to his do boil within him, as hatred or malice doth in a malicious man towards his enemy, so as he cannot contain and forbear expressing it towards him: that as David says his 'thoughts did burn within him,' and at last break forth; so in God, 'I know the thoughts I think towards you,' says he to them of the captivity, Jer. xxix. 11, 'they are thoughts of peace, and not of evil.' And, (2.) besides that these his thoughts of peace are taken up of himself, his Son also hath bespoken peace for us; and therefore God will speak it: even as Joseph, though he spake roughly a while to his brethren, yet could not in the end contain, Gen. xiv. 1; so nor God.

Reason 2.—Secondly, let us consider who they are to whom he is to speak it. They are his people, as the text hath it; and to them there is no question but he will speak peace, though he seems angry for a while. They are his people, that is the reason given, 1 Sam. xii. 22, 'He will not cast off his people;' as also Isa. lxiii. 8, 10, 'When they rebelled, he was wroth; yet he said, Surely they are my people: so I was their Saviour.' *They?* why they are the 'sons of peace,' Luke x. 6, ordained for peace, and therefore shall be sure to have it; and although some differences may arise betwixt God and them, yet there is a natural *συναγῆ* in the Lord, that moves him to speak peace in the end to them. As the dumb son of Croesus, when he saw his

father like to be killed, though he had never spake before, yet then, out of an impetus of spirit, the strings of his tongue were unloosed, and he cried out to the murderer, 'Kill not King Cræsus;' so, when the enemies of his church are ready to devour his people, and Satan is ready to swallow his child up in despair, then God's bowels work within him, and he can hold no longer, but cries, 'Save my child, save my church.' 'Is Ephraim my pleasant child?' says God, Jer. xxxi. 20. Well, says God, 'though I spake against him,' and took him up, and chid him soundly, yet I cannot forget my child, says he, nor my fatherly affection to him, but 'my bowels are stirred, and I will surely have mercy on him.'

Reason 3.—Thirdly, otherwise if God did not in the end speak peace, they would indeed return to folly, which is the third thing in the text. For his end of speaking peace is, that they might not return to folly: Ps. cxxv. 3, 'The rod of the wicked shall not always lie upon the righteous, lest they put forth their hand to iniquity;' therefore, at the last verse, 'peace shall be upon Israel.' As for this cause he speaks outward peace, so also inward, and suffers not the rod of Satan, and of his own heavy displeasure, to lie upon their hearts, for else they would return to the pleasures of sin; for every creature must have some delight: their spirits would fail, and be tired out else, and wearied in good duties, if God should not in the end speak peace, Isa. lvii., 'The spirit would fail before me.' When the child swoonds in the whipping, God lets fall the rod, and falls a-kissing it, to fetch life into it again. As it is a rule in physic still to maintain nature, and therefore when that shall be in hazard to be destroyed, they leave giving purging physic, and give cordials; so doth God with his people: though with purging physic he often brings their spirits very weak and low, yet he will uphold and maintain their spirits, so as they shall not fail and be extinguished, but then he will give cordials to raise them up again.

Use 3.—What good heart that bears a childlike affection to God would offend such a God, that be thy distresses what they will be, will certainly speak peace? Then do not put him to it, spend not upon that precious stock of his free grace and love. It is true 'he is married to thee,' and therefore 'though thou hast gone a-whoring after many lovers,' Jer. iii. 1, 2, 14, still he says, 'Return, for I am married to thee.' As, therefore, when man and wife are fallen out, they consider, We must live together, and therefore they reconcile themselves again; so consider it must be between God and thee, and make it a means and motive to recover thee, as Samuel did to the Israelites, 1 Sam. xii. 22, 'You have committed this great sin; yet turn not aside from following the Lord, for God will not cast you off, you are his people.' Go home to him again, he will speak peace. Think thus, The time will come wherein God will be friends again with me, he and I cannot be strange long; though I would, he will not; Isa. lvii. 18, 19, though he went on stubbornly, yet God healed him, and would not lose his child, therefore I will return of myself.

THE FOLLY OF RELAPSING AFTER PEACE SPOKEN.

But let them turn no more to folly.—PSALM LXXXV. 8.

6. THE sixth observation is, That peace being spoken to their hearts by God, they should 'return no more to folly.' See this, Ezra ix. 13, 14, 'Thou having punished us less than we deserve, and given us such a deliverance as this, should we again break thy commandments, wouldest thou not be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us?'

Reason 1.—Because it will be a greater aggravation in sinning. It is made the aggravation of Solomon's sin, 1 Kings xi. 9, 'that God had appeared to him twice.' They were especial appearances and manifestations of mercy; and though such do now cease, yet we read of such as are analogical to them: as, John xiv. 21, Christ promiseth to manifest himself, which is by shedding abroad his love and his Father's love into the heart, which is evident by the former words, 'he shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him,' and after he saith, 'We will come to him, and make our abode with him,' ver. 23, and ver. 27, 'My peace I will give unto you.' Now such appearances will be set upon the score of every sin many years after, as they were upon Solomon's. And the reason is, because nothing wounds an ingenuous, loving nature more than matter of unkindness: 'If it had been my enemy,' says David, 'I could have borne it,' Ps. lv. 12, 14; 'but it was thou, O man, mine acquaintance; we took sweet counsel together:' a bosom friend, to whom I had committed my secrets, opened my heart. Thus, when God hath unbosomed himself, as it were, to a man, and told him what was in his heart towards him, this goes nigh him if he lifts up the heel against him. And the reason of that further also is—(1.) Because of all things else, a man cannot endure to have his love abused; you come nigh him when you do so, for his love is himself, and commands all in him; so that abuse his love, and you strike at his heart. It is less to abuse any excellency in a man, to reproach and extenuate his parts, learning, &c., though these are dear to him; but his love is his bowels. And therefore, when God hath opened his heart to a man, and set his love upon him, and revealed it to him, and he carries himself unworthily, it pains him at the heart. Besides, (2.) it is against the law of nature and of nations to seek out for a peace, and get it concluded, and then secretly to prepare for and enter into a war: nothing more hateful, or can exasperate two

nations one against another more than this. It was the aggravation of Absalom's sin that, being newly reconciled with his father, and taken into favour again, after two years' discountenance, he then began to rebel more closely.

Reason 2.—The second reason is intimated in the word 'folly:' as if the Lord should have said, Set aside the unkindness and wrong you do to me, yet therein you befool yourselves: you will have the worst of it. And indeed, when God doth afterwards draw nigh to a man again, upon that his recovery of his peace, it appears to be folly, even in that man's own apprehension. When he hath tasted how sweet God is, then come and ask him, What, will ye return to sin again? he will then say, Ask me if I will wound or cut my flesh. It is impossible, thinks he, I should any more be so besotted; if there were no other motives, he thinks it the greatest folly in the world. And therefore God on purpose chooseth out that expression, and placeth it here in this case, because it is indeed the greatest folly in God's sight, and is so apprehended by ourselves, looking upon sin after peace is spoken to us. It is folly to sin against God at any time, but especially then, and that will appear by these particulars:—

(1.) Because, before a man had that peace he felt the bitterness of sin, for God never speaks peace till that be felt. Now, that is an argument even to sense never to return to it again, which a fool will be warned by: a burnt child dreads the fire; even a child will take heed, being taught by sense. When a man shall be in great distress, and his conscience shall suggest to him, as Jer. iv. 18, 'Thy ways and thy doings have procured these things to thee: this is thy wickedness,'—a speech like that when you say to your children, when they have gotten any harm, or cold, or sickness, This is your playing, and gadding, and going in the snow, and your eating of fruit, &c.,—so doth God speak there to them when they were in distress, 'This is your wickedness, for it is bitter, it reacheth to the heart;' it woundeth the conscience, the wounding of which, of all else, is the greatest misery. When once a man after this hath peace restored to him, and he comes newly out of such a distress, ask him then how he likes turning to such a sin again, and he will tell you it is the greatest folly in the world: ask David if he will murder any more after his bones have been broken and set again.

(2.) Thou wilt easily acknowledge it is folly to return to sin again if thou considerest the terms upon which thou didst obtain thy peace. Reckon what pains it cost thee to wash out the guilt and stain which sin had made, what vows and resolutions thou madest, what bonds thou didst seal unto, what promises never to return, what prayers and tears, what raps and knocks at heaven's gates ere thou couldest get an answer, or God to speak one word, he making as if he had not been within: why, is it not folly now to lose that in an instant thou hast been a-getting so long, haply many years, and with so much pains and cost? You use it as an excuse to prodigals to say things lightly come by are lightly gone; and yet you count them and call them fools for it, as not knowing what it is to earn a penny: how much more folly is it when a man having before mortgaged his peace, and God restored it again after much suit, and waiting many a term, then to come home and venture to cast all away at one throw at dice? Such a fool art thou when thou returnest to sin. To drink that at one draught which thou hast been getting many a year, what madness is it! When thou hast taken much pains to wash thyself, then to wallow in the mire again, and make thyself new work, what folly is it! Who but children and fools will do thus? That

which the church said in another case may well be alluded to in this : Cant. v. 3, 'I have washed my feet ; how shall I defile them ?

(3.) Consider what it is thou dost hazard to lose by returning to folly—thy peace, (David lost it, as appears Ps. li. 12 ; therefore, says he, 'Restore to me the joy of thy salvation ;') in losing of which thou wilt be so much a loser, that if the sin thou choosest were able to give thee all the world, it could not recompense thee ; no, not the loss of one hour's communion with God, which in a moment will bring thee in more sweetness than all thy sins can do to eternity. If all the pleasures of sin were contracted, and the quintessence of them strained into one cup, they would not afford so much as one drop of true peace with God doth, being let fall into the heart. It is 'peace which passeth understanding.' Few pleasures here do exceed the senses ; nay, the senses are capable of more than the things can give ; but this passeth understanding. 'God's loving-kindness is better than life.' If it were propounded to thee, thou must lose thy life next moment if thou shouldst commit such a sin, wouldest thou venture, if thou didst believe it ? Now 'the loving-kindness of God is better than life,' and wilt thou lose the enjoying of it, though but for a moment ?

(4.) It is folly to return again, because the pleasures of sin will be much less to thee after thou hast had peace spoken. Take them at the best, when they are freshest, and when thy palate was most in relish and taste with them, when thou wert carnal, and ere thou knewest what sweetness was in God, and they then were but poor sorry pleasures. But now they will prove far more empty than before : they are empty vain pleasures even to him that hath them in their flower, and in his season of sinning ; and therefore all wicked men are weary, and do inwardly complain of their condition, only they cannot find sweetness in God, and so are fain to keep themselves to their husks ; but, alas ! to thee they are far less worth than to another man, who knows not God, and therefore thou art like to have a worse bargain of it. Another man can make more money of a sin, and get more pleasure out of it, than thou art able to do.

For, *first*, thy conscience having been scorched with sin,—as scalded flesh adheres more, and is more sensible in coming to the fire, than other parts of the body,—is become of a quicker sense ; whereas wicked men's is seared, and so they commit 'all uncleanness with greediness ;' but thine is tender and galled in the act, which allays much of the pleasure of thy sin, and minglcth the more bitterness with it.

And, *secondly*, besides this galling of conscience, which is common to thee with many an unregenerate man, thou hast a principle of grace, an inner man, which is dead to such pleasures, that tastes them not, that is like Bazzilai, who, through age, 2 Sam. xix. 35, could not taste either what he ate or drank, as young men do ; no more can that new man in thee, and therefore it can be but half as pleasant to thee as to another man. If one side of a man be taken all with a numb palsy, what pleasure is it to that man to exercise his limbs in the actions of life ? He is but half a man, and lives but half a life. So it is with thee when thou hast grace in thy heart : but half thy heart can take pleasure in sinning ; that new man, the other half, reluctates, grieves for it, hates what thou doest ; and all this must needs strike off much of the pleasure.

But, *thirdly*, if we add to this, that this new man in him, having once tasted what sweetness is in God, and how good the Lord is, is then like a man that hath eaten sweetmeats, other things are out of taste with him, and therefore

also it is folly to return. 'No man,' says Christ, Luke v. 39, 'having drunk old wine desireth new, for he saith the old is better;' a man used to high fare cannot agree so well with thin diet: so the soul having been used to taste of great pleasures in God, the impression and remembrance of them leaves his soul less satisfied than another man's. A stomach that hath been enlarged to full diet, looks for it, and riseth more hungry from a slender meal; now communion with God enlarges the faculties, and widens them, and makes them more capable of greater joys than other men have, and therefore the creature is less able to fill them; still he remembers with much grief, whilst he is eating his husks, what fare he had in his father's house; and oh, 'then it was better with me than now.' Call me not Naomi, but call me Marah, as she said, 'for I went out full, and am come home empty;' so doth he say when he comes from the act of sinning, he went with his heart full of peace, and meeting with a bargain of sinning, thought to eke out his joy, and make it fuller, but he comes home empty.

Use 1.—The first use is to those who have had peace spoken to them: Let them at such times fear themselves and God most, for then comes in this, as you see here, as the most seasonable admonition that can be given, to return no more to folly.

(1.) Fear God then most; for of all times else then sins provoke him most. To come and call him father, and the guide of your youth, and yet to fall to sin, this is to do as evil as you can, you cannot do worse, Jer. iii. 4, 5. So Ezra ix. 13, 14, 'After such an escaping should we again break thy commandments, wouldest thou not be angry till thou hadst consumed us?' In times of affliction it is the property of a good child to love God most: in times of speaking peace, to fear God most and his goodness, and to fear to offend him for his goodness' sake. Did I only say that God is provoked most then, if you return to folly? Nay, I add further, he is grieved, which is more than to be provoked; and therefore you shall mark that expression and admonition not to 'grieve God's Spirit,' then comes in when the 'Spirit hath sealed us up to the day of redemption,' Eph. iv. 30. Then by sinning we are said more properly to grieve him than before, when he hath so far engaged himself to love a man, and expressed himself to him, and set his seal upon him for his. God is angry with wicked men's sins, but he is grieved for yours. To grieve him is more than to anger him. Mere anger is an affection can ease itself by revenge, and by coming even again with the party; and when we can or intend to do so, our minds are not so much aggrieved, but please themselves rather to think of the revenge which we mean to execute: so when wicked men sin whom God means to meet with, he is said to be angry rather than grieved; and says, 'I will ease myself of mine adversaries,' Isa. i. 24, 'and avenge myself of mine enemies.' But here, as when a man's wife that lies in his bosom, or his child, shall wrong him; so is it when one sins whom God hath set himself to love, and done much for, and made known his everlasting kindness unto, and sealed to the day of redemption. This goes to his heart, grieves him rather than angers him; and such are the truest and deepest griefs. What should he do with you in this case? If afflict you, and by that means go about to turn you from your iniquity, therein he shall but afflict himself as it were; for 'though they rebelled, yet when they were afflicted he was afflicted,' Isa. lxiii. 9, 10. As when a father that is a magistrate, or as one that maintains a student in a college, if either punisheth a child or pupil in his purse, he punisheth himself; so must God afflict himself to afflict you. Put not the Lord into these straits if you have any love in you. And—

(2.) As thou art therefore to fear God most then, so thyself most, and to be more watchful over thy own heart; thou art then apt to return to folly, if thou takest not heed; as when a man hath been very hot, or sweat much, he is apt to take the greatest cold. Hezekiah, after God sealed peace to him and answered his prayers, and renewed the lease of his life, his heart got cold, he did return to folly. The reason is, because then the heart is apt to grow less watchful, and to think itself fortified enough against any temptation. As St Peter, having seen Christ transfigured in the mount, grew confident in his own strength. And know that the devil watcheth such an opportunity most, for he gets a great victory if he can foil thee then, after he hath been foiled himself, and when thou art most triumphing over him. How many battles have been lost through security of victory and recoiling of the enemy! And besides, our corrupt nature, so far as unrenewed, is apt to gather heart to itself, to slight sin, as thinking its pardon easily gotten.

Therefore when thou art tempted, labour often to renew those thoughts which thou hadst of thy sin at that time when thou wert suing for peace, before thy peace was gotten; when thou wouldest have given a world for God's favour; and also what thoughts thou hadst of it when God spake peace, how thou didst abhor it, yea, thyself. And look what sin was most bitter to thee and an enemy to thy peace,—as if uncleanness, idleness, neglect of prayer, ill company, &c.,—and preserve in thy heart those bitter apprehensions of it, and say of it, Thou hast 'been a bloody sin to me,' (as Moses's wife said of her husband :) and though I have got peace and my life saved, yet it was a bloody sin to Christ, his blood was shed to purchase this my peace; and shall I return to it?

And when tempted to it again, have recourse to the kindness God shewed thee in pardoning, and say, 'How shall I do this, and sin against God?' say as he said, 'Is this thy kindness to thy friend?' 2 Sam. xvi. 17; and what! shall I, Absalom-like, now I am new reconciled to my Father, fall a-plotting treason again? What! shall I make more work for prayer, more work for God, break my bones again, and lie roaring again? Think thus, I was burned in the hand before, I shall be racked surely now. 'Sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee.'

Use 2.—The doctrine of assurance, if not abused, and of God speaking peace to men, is no dangerous doctrine to make men secure and presumptuous in sinning. When peace is preached in any man's heart, this use naturally flows from that doctrine, 'Return no more to folly.' The very scope of the whole epistle of St John is to help all believers to assurance, as appears by 1 John i. 4, v. 13, 'These things I write you, that ye might have communion with God, and that your joy might be full.' But this will open a way to all licentiousness. No, says St John, chap. ii. 1, 'These things I write unto you, that ye sin not.' Nothing guards the heart more against tentations than the peace of God: it is said to guard the heart, Phil. iv. 7. Yea, and if you do sin, the assurance of God's love is the speediest way to recover you; so it follows, 'If any one doth sin, we have an advocate with the Father,' &c. 'And he that hath this hope in him,'—that is, to live with Christ,—and 'knows what manner of love the Father bears us,' 'purifies himself as he is pure,' 1 John iii. 1–3.

If there were no more but self-love in a man, it were then no wonder if he doth abuse it. For self-love, where the love of God is wanting, is unthankful and ungrateful, willing to take all the love and kindness which is afforded, and abuse it, and work upon it for its own advantage. And it is true also that because we have too much of this principle unmortified in us, therefore

God trusteth so few with much assurance, because they would abuse it. But where true love to God is seated, and much of it implanted, there the love of God and the peace of God doth as kindly and naturally enkindle and inflame and set it a-work, even as arguments suitable to self-love do work upon and stir that principle. For grace is more for God than for ourselves, it being the image of God's holiness, whose holiness consists in this, to aim at himself in all; and therefore when God's free grace towards a man is revealed, it raiseth him up to higher strains of love to God and hatred of sin. And therefore it is observable, Ps. li. 12, that David, when he prays for 'the restoring of the joy of his salvation,' he prays not simply for it, or alone. but withal prays for a free spirit, 'Establish me with thy free spirit;' that is, a spirit of ingenuity, which is kindly, sweetly, and freely wrought upon. Therefore when we have a free spirit wrought in us, then that free love that is in God towards us will work most kindly upon it, and constrain us to love him that loved us first. 'The love of Christ constrains us,' 2 Cor. v. 14, 'because we thus judge, that if Christ died for all, then they which live should not live unto themselves, but unto him that died for them.' St Paul gives the reason why this love of Christ did thus constrain him, because he did thus judge; that is, this consideration of Christ's love, he having a principle of love in his heart to Christ, he found to be a powerful prevailing reason to persuade him to live to Christ. Having a new judgment, he saw force and strength in the argument. And so shall we if we thus judge; and it will have this natural consequence as naturally to follow upon it in our hearts, as any reason in any other kind hath, that is brought to enforce any other conclusion. And therefore as the mind is constrained, as it were, to assent to a truth proved by force of reason, that if you grant this, then this or that will follow; so because we judge this reasonable by an argument drawn out of love's topics, that if Christ died for all, who otherwise must themselves have died, that then they should live to him; this will constrain us to love him, and live to him. *Amor Dei est extaticus, nec se sinit esse sui juris.*

This text and admonition here gives a just occasion to consider a little of that so often questioned case of conscience concerning relapses of God's children into the same sins and folly again, and whether, after peace spoken, God's people may return again to folly. Some have held that a man after a second repentance could not fall into the same sin again; others, if he did, it excluded him from mercy for time to come. For the comfort of some poor souls, whose ease and temptation this may be, I will speak somewhat, though sparingly and with caution.

1. The Scripture nowhere excludeth those from the state of grace, or bars mercy from those that have relapsed into the same sin, especially so long as in regard of the manner of their sinning it be but folly, not wickedness or wilful sinning; that is, rather proceeding out of error of understanding, and heat and impetuousness of foolish affections, than obstinacy and malice in the will, and with 'despite of the Spirit of grace,' Heb. x. 29. Yea—

2. In Scripture we meet with such passages and promises as may undoubtedly uphold any soul that hath so fallen, after peace received, into the same sin, and preserve him from apprehending himself excluded therefore from mercy and the state of grace. As, Hosea xiv. 4, 'I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely.' Unless they had fallen after repenting and former healing, it could not have been called backsliding; and yet

this he promises to heal, and withal shews the ground that moves him to it, his loving them freely. For if in anything his free love is shewn to any of his children, and drawn out, it is in healing again such a backsliding soul after recovery and peace given; for the falling into the same sin which hath been repented of and healed, provokes God more than a thousand other acts of sins formerly committed, though of the same kind. And therein also to shew his free love, that he can pardon even the abuse of love itself, he leaves some thus to sin after his love shed abroad in their hearts. Some he shews his free love unto, in keeping them from sinning; others, in pardoning them, and giving them repentance. They are but several ways of drawing it forth; so that, if in anything, herein his free love is shewn, for if it were not free it would never endure itself to be abused.

And likewise the sure mercies of David are then shewn, when God ‘multiplies to pardon;’ so, Isa. lv. 3, having mentioned the promise of the ‘sure mercies of David,’ he promises to ‘multiply to pardon,’ as it is in the original, ver. 7; which are thus joined, both because the sureness of his covenant is therein shewn, and because we might haply multiply to sin; and at least it supposeth the possibility of it again. God likewise runs upon such a supposition in that expression of his to his own people, Jer. iii. 1, 2, ‘They say, If a man put away his wife, and she become another man’s, shall not the land be greatly polluted? But thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the Lord.’ He speaks to her as to one who had been his wife, who though she had not been put away by him, but had put away herself, and run away, not once, but often, and that with many lovers; and sometimes in the midst of her whoredoms, had come in and made challenge of his former love, and pleaded his former mercy to her, and yet fallen back again, ver. 4, 5, (where he adds, ‘Wilt thou not from this time cry, My father, and thou art the guide of my youth?’ that is, I know, says God, you will come now and cry, as heretofore you have done, and say, Oh, thou art my father and my husband, and confidently still claim an interest in me upon my former kindness, and yet do as evil as you can, for you cannot do worse than thus to abuse my love,) yet, for all this, at the 12th verse, ‘Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; for I am married to you,’ ver 14. That which he doth thus to a nation, he may do to a particular man who is his child. Again—

3. There are not altogether examples wanting for this :—

Examp. 1.—We find Samson, a godly man, (whom yet we would scarce have thought such, but that we find his name in the list of those worthies, Heb. xi.) ensnared with a Philistine woman, against the counsel of his parents, Judg. xiv. 3, who clearly laid open his sin to him. And he was in the event reproved for his folly, for his wife deceived him, told his riddle to his enemies; which he in the end perceived. And further to reprove him, in the issue she was given away to another, ver. 16, 17, 20. From all which passages of reproof, a holy man, that had his eyes in his head, could not but see his error. And yet again, a long while after this, (twenty years after, Judg. xv. 20,) when certainly ere that he had repented of this his sin, for which his parents before, and after God, so clearly did rebuke him, he went to Gaza, Judg. xvi. 1, ‘and saw a harlot, and went in to her,’ and there escaped narrowly with his life at midnight; and, ver. 4, after that also it came to pass he fell in love with another, as bad as any of the former, Delilah, who was his ruin. But his returning thus to folly cost him dear, for in the end he was taken as a captive to the Philistines, his enemies, and that through her falsehood; deprived of his strength he had spent upon these women, had his

eyes, those betraying lights, put out, that had ensnared him; and himself made a fool of, to make his enemies sport. So as no child of God can take any great encouragement thus to return to folly for the future by his example; though comfort they may have therefrom in case they have returned for the time past.

Examp. 2.—Another example may be that of Jehoshaphat, who committed a great sin in joining with Ahab, that wicked king that ‘sold himself to work wickedness,’ 2 Chron. xviii. 1–3; and he was foretold what would be the success of that confederacy and journey by Micaiah, before he went with him to battle, and after in the battle itself, where he hardly escaped with his life, and by an extraordinary providence at his prayer was delivered, ver. 31, 32; and as if that were not sufficient, God sends another prophet to him, chap. xix. 2, who with open mouth reproves him, and discovers to him his sin, ‘Shouldst thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord:’ which message to so good a man doubtless was not in vain, but humbled him for that his sin, and wrought repentance in him to avert that wrath. And yet after that great and miraculous deliverance of him and his people, chap. xx., we find him relapsing into the same sin, ver. 35, ‘After this did Jehoshaphat join himself with Ahaziah, king of Israel, who did very wickedly. And he joined himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish;’ which another prophet in like manner reproveth, and likewise God himself rebuked by the like ill success of that league to the former: ‘the ships were broken,’ ver. 37.

Examp. 3.—St Peter, a man who seemed by other of his carriages bold enough, was yet three several times surprised with base fear: once when he tempted Christ not to hazard himself at Jerusalem, where Christ told him that he was to suffer, Matt. xvi. 21–23, ‘Master,’ says he, ‘spare thyself;’ upon which speech Christ calls him Satan, rebuketh him more sharply than at any other time, for which surely there was a more than ordinary cause. St Peter thought that if his Master should suffer at Jerusalem, that himself and the rest should not be safe. That speech, therefore, proceeded from fear; and therefore Christ doth immediately thereupon call for self-denial and taking up the cross, ver. 24. And this was immediately after peace spoken, ver. 16–18. Christ had never more comfortably given testimony to St Peter and his faith than there. Yet again, after this, Christ had him up into the mount, and transfigured himself, to hearten him against that trial to come, which made him so confident; yet then he denied him at his arraignment: when again Christ, immediately upon that, looked back upon him with so sweet a look as broke his heart for this his folly; and so he returned again, and it cost him many a tear. And Christ, after the resurrection, owned him again more than any of the rest; bade them that first met him, ‘Go tell Peter.’ He mentions him by name, and in especial: Go tell him the first news of it. And then also he asked him, ‘Peter, lovest thou me?’ and he said, ‘Lord, thou knowest I love thee:’ as if he had said, ‘Though I have played the wretch, yet I love thee.’ Upon this, though he grew more bold, Acts iv. 13, yet, Gal. ii. 11, 12, we find him falling into the grudgings of the same disease, which cast him into another fit: ‘he dissembled, fearing them of the circumcision.’ This was a spice of the former sin, though not so gross; and though the outward acts in these sins were diverse in their occasions, yet they were all acts and buds of the same root of bitterness; and may as well be called sins of the same kind as the committing differing acts of uncleanness are reckoned falling into the same sin.

4. In the fourth place, if the Scriptures had been utterly silent in examples,

yet reason, consonant to other principles, and grounds of divinity, and of the Scriptures, might persuade the same.

Reason 1.—If he may, after the most serious and thorough repentance, fall again into as grievous a sin of another kind, and return ; why not into the same again ? I confess there is some disparity, which might make him more averse, and set him in some more remoteness from the same sin he hath particularly repented of than another ; which shall be considered in its place. Yet the difference cannot be supposed such as should make the one possible, and not the other ; all true repentance working the heart to an abominating every sin, as well as any : and therefore, if it were true, it was for that particular sin, as sin ; and then it would work the like against all and every sin, according to the measure of the sinfulness. And though it may and doth work a more keen and special hatred against that particular sin a man hath been most stung with, yet still this is but so far as this aggravation (to fall into the same sin again) may cause such a relapse to be more sinful than another sin. And so far, and upon that ground, he is and may be more set and strengthened against it than against another sin. But then, if the supposition fall upon another gross sin, never before committed, the sole and single act of which other circumstances make as heinous even as this reiterated act of a sin formerly committed can be, then the one is equally as possible as the other. But, however, yet still the difference is but in degrees,—namely, in that the heart is elongated a degree or so further from that sin formerly committed than any other,—which will not therefore so vary the case (as *magis* and *minus* do not) that it should be made impossible to fall into the one, and not into the other.

Reason 2.—If he may fall into some gross sin, which at first conversion he did above all other humble himself for, and yet that same initial repentance did not put him into such an impossibility of falling into that sin again ; why then should a renewed act of repentance for the same, or for some other reiterated sin, be supposed to have such virtue in it as to make him shot-free for ever from the same fiery dart again ?

Reason 3.—Again, thirdly, let it be considered from whence it should be that a renewed, or indeed any act of true repentance, though never so great and intense, should have such a transcendent, eternal, and invincible virtue in it, and privilege annexed to it ; for how is it that repentance doth strengthen us against sin, but by restoring the decayed frame of grace to a better constitution and greater degree of strength than before, and by raising it above a man's lusts, and above that lust more than all other ? As in David, when he prayed, ' Create in me a clean heart,' which, through his sin of uncleanness, was in an especial manner defiled with a proneness to that sin. But yet withal remember, that that new frame of heart and strength gotten by that renewed repentance, and that augmentation and increase of hatred against, and abominating that sin wrought by it, is all but a creature,—as grace and every new degree of grace is,—and therefore, for preserving us, hath in itself but the power and force of a created habit, which may be prevailed against by the sin that is in us ; and can no more, nay, much less, put us into a state of confirmation against any particular sin, than the grace of the angels could of itself confirm them in a state against all sin.

And as for the impression of that bitterness which, in our repentance for that sin fallen into, was made upon our hearts, that also can be supposed to have but the like force upon our spirits that the impression of joy unspeakable and glorious hath upon the heart in those heavenly raptures which believers sometimes enjoy. Yea, and the latter of these will easily be sup-

posed to be of the greater efficacy of the two, and both but creatures. Now those ravishing joys are not yet such immortal and everlastingly quickening cordials, that put such spirits into a man as to preserve him from swounds and faintings of spirit for ever; and though, whilst they abide and are present to the heart, they do then raise it above all things here below, yet when a man hath been a while off from that mount, and hath conversed a while with things here again below, then that lustre wears away, as the glory that shined in Moses's face did, and after a while the sense and present taste of those joys wears out; and when that is gone, the bare remembrance of them which is left hath not, in their absence, such an infallible, though a great efficacy to preserve his mind in an everlasting disrelishing former delights, but that he may and often doth fall in love again too much with them; although indeed whilst the present sense of them did abide upon the heart, it abstracted the mind from all things here below. And hence a man is apt to 'fall from his first love,' Rev. ii, and from that high esteem of spiritual things; as the Galatians, chap. iv. 15, 'Where is the blessedness you spake of?' says St Paul to them. Therefore answerably the remembrance of the bitterness of any sin felt in our deepest humiliations is much less able to preserve a man, nor is the impression and dint made so lasting, nor the scars and wounds of conscience continuing for ever so fresh, as everlastingly to preserve and deter us from falling into the same sin again. For both are but creatures, and at best but arguments drawn from sense and experience within ourselves, and have but a human created power which is not always efficacious; especially seeing God hath ordained us to 'live by faith more than by sense,' for faith is appointed by God to be our more constant keeper, 1 Peter i. 5, 'We are kept through faith unto salvation,' and by it more surely and more constantly than by impressions of joy or sorrow which are made to sense: and yet we are not kept by it of itself, but by the power of God. So then we are kept by the power of God as the principal supporter and guardian, through faith as the instrumental, and by it rather than by sense or any other grace of sorrow or repentance, because faith carries the heart out of itself, and commits itself wholly into the hands of God as a faithful Creator, (who is the strength of Israel, to keep a man from every evil work,) as not being able to secure itself against any sin through the power of any fortification or strength that any other grace or degree of grace hath built, no, not for one moment; and therefore is as dependent upon God after a fall, and a renewed repentance out of it, yea, and more than before he fell; and his own woeful experience hath reason to make him so.

The like instance to illustrate the truth of this we may draw from the assurance of faith itself. For even the assurance of faith itself,—which is an act properly belonging to that grace, called therefore the assurance of faith, Heb. x. 22,—which doth strengthen us as much against doubting, when it is joined with joy unspeakable and glorious, as repentance can do against any other sin; and whilst it is upon us, in the strength of it a believer is apt to think himself armed and strengthened, and so established as that he shall never question God's love any more, or the pardon of his sins; and yet, experience shews it, that the guilt of sin prevails sometimes again after this, and the same doubts arise and prevail as much as ever. Neither will the remembrance of the former assurance be always of force enough to resist them; for he may come to question that assurance itself also, and so forget that he was purged from his old sins. And if the guilt of sin prevail in the conscience again, against such a renewed and settled act of faith, why may not

the power of a lust prevail in the members after a renewed act of repentance?

Reason 4.—If it be said that a renewed act of thorough repentance doth keep a man, not by any peculiar virtue in itself alone, but by the power of God concurrent with it; then I demand to see the promise wherein God hath infallibly obliged and engaged his power, upon such a renewed act of repentance, to preserve from falling into that sin of all other for ever, without which no man in faith can affirm it, and without which there is an *it may be*, and a supposition of such a possibility as sometime falleth out and is reduced to existence. God indeed hath said, that if we fall he will put under his hand to break that fall, that it shall not ruin us; but not so to keep us in his hands as we shall be out of danger of falling again. A renewed act of repentance is indeed an ordinance sanctified to preserve a man; yet but in the same manner that other ordinances are, as prayer, and the word preached, and admonition, &c., with which God doth not always so infallibly co-operate as efficaciously to work always that which they serve to.

5. If there were not such a possibility as might and doth sometimes fail out, then every regenerate man, after such a renewed act of repentance, might secure himself against the committing that gross act again for ever; but so he can never do against any particular act of sin but that sin against the Holy Ghost. St Paul therefore exhorts, when a brother is fallen into a sin, to 'restore such a one with the spirit of meekness,' upon this consideration, 'considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted;' and he lays the exhortation upon those who are most spiritual: 'Ye that are spiritual, restore such a one, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted,' Gal. vi. 1; so as he speaks of such as have their hearts raised up to the best frame, through the most deep and serious repentance. And now we will suppose one that hath formerly fallen himself into the same sin which another is fallen into, but not yet restored, but himself is returned by repentance out of it; for, indeed, such a spiritual man is of all other like to be the meekest bone-setter of a man fallen; and even such doth St Paul exhort to consider that themselves may for the time to come be also or in like manner tempted,—that is fall as this man fell,—and therefore so be tempted as to fall into the same sin again that he was fallen into. And if any man could be secure from the like fall again, he had been out of the reach of this exhortation to this duty upon that ground mentioned, as not capable of it. But the Holy Ghost hath elsewhere, 1 Cor. x. 13, told us, that there is no temptation which is common to man but is incident to befall any man at any time; and therefore, ver. 12, exhorts 'him that standeth' to 'take heed lest he fall.' Indeed, that temptation which is common to devils with men, the sin of final despair, and against the Holy Ghost, &c., a regenerate man may, through the grace of Christ, secure himself against; but all such sins as are common to man, from these or any of them, no man, in any state, can, without an extraordinary revelation, secure himself from the commission of.

Only I add these cautions concerning this case:—

Caution 1.—There are two sorts of corruptions. First, more gross corruptions, which St Peter calls τὰ μιάσματα τοῦ κόσμου, 'the defilements of the world,' 2 Pet. ii. 20; they being the common mire or kennel wherein the unclean swine of this world wallow, and which the Apostle calls such 'works of the flesh as are manifest,' Gal. v. 19, even to the light of nature; such as are adultery, fornication, drunkenness, &c.; and by those two expressions do they distinguish them from a sort of more spiritual and refined lusts. For, secondly, there are corruptions more spiritual, as pride, secret love of the

world. Now, for those gross corruptions which are contrary even to common honesty, and, to use Job's phrase, 'are punished by the judges,' chap. xxxi. 11, which profane men wallow in, a godly man hath more strength against them, so as it is not so ordinary for him to be entangled again and again with these. For where but moral principles are, these are abstained from, as we see in the Pharisee,—I am no adulterer, &c.,—therefore, where grace is, much more. And some sins are more opposite to the spirit of holiness, and less compatible with grace, as uncleanness, of which St Paul says, 'God hath not called us to uncleanness, but to holiness,' 1 Thess. iv. 7; it is in an especial manner there opposed to holiness; and such as these are 'works of the flesh, which are manifest,' even to nature, to civil men; and therefore, when they are often fallen into, they do manifest that the heart is but flesh. And although the limits, how seldom or how often, cannot be set concerning relapses into these or any sins, yet, in an ordinary course, it may be said that few godly men fall into such sins again and again. God keeps them from such in an ordinary providence, that scandals should not arise; they being sins which all the world takes notice of. But those other sins of rash anger, and love of the world, and spiritual pride, &c., these being less manifest, and sitting more close to our spirits, godly men are more subject unto.

Caution 2.—Yet, secondly, we must again distinguish:—

(1.) There are the inward lustings to those outward acts now, though grace weakeneth the very lustings within, yet takes them not wholly away: 'The spirit that is in us,'—that is, in us saints,—says St James, 'lusteth to envy;' and as to envy, so to all other sins. And—

(2.) Secondly, there are the outward gross acts of such sins; and therein the weakness of sin in a regenerate man and strength of grace shews itself most in preserving from them. For, as 'to will is present with me,' says St Paul, 'to will what is good, yet how to perform it I am not able,' Rom. vii. 18: so, on the contrary, to lust the heart may be ready, and lust may soon rise up in rebellion, but when it should come to the act there is a weakness discovered; they come to the birth, and want strength often to bring forth; the contrary lusting and prevailing of grace being then seen and discovering itself. That it fareth with a regenerate man in this case often as with a man that is deadly wounded, who riseth up to strike his enemy, and thinks to run him through, but sinks down again, *medio conatu*, when his sword is at his enemy's breast, through a deficiency of spirits. Or as a man in a palsy, or the gout, who thinks he is able to walk till he comes to try, and then he finds a weakness which makes him fall back again. Thus, even when the whole forces of lusts are mustered up, yet the weapons fall out of their hands. Humours, in a healthful constitution, may stir and boake* in the stomach, when yet they come not up, nor prevail unto vomiting. In that place aforementioned, Gal. v., the Apostle seems not to deny but that in the most regenerate lustings may arise; for 'the flesh,' says he, 'lusteth against the spirit,' ver. 17; but yet, as for outward acts, he tells them, ver. 16, 'that if ye walk in the spirit,'—that is, in the prevalency of the spirit, keeping up a holy frame of heart above the flesh,—that then 'ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh:' for that frame of heart so kept up will hinder the outward fulfilling of the lust, which is never done till flesh and corruption is actually raised above the spirit, and gets more voices to carry it; till the spirit be under-hatches and the flesh above, and so steers the helm. Otherwise the lusting of the spirit against the flesh will hinder the outward doing and fulfilling of a lust.

For the reason he gives, ver. 17, 'so as you cannot do what you would,'

* Retch.—Ed.

implies, that not only lustings, which arise without consent, may be in such a man, but further, much of the will may be won to consent to them, to like them ; when yet there is not strength enough to carry it on to the outward act, 'you cannot do what you would.' And what those works of the flesh are, which are manifest works of the flesh, and which Christians, whilst they walk in the spirit, fulfil not, he mentions and reckons up in the following words. And this is the more ordinary frame of a Christian's heart ; for, ver. 24, says he, 'They that are Christ's have crucified the affections and lusts,' that is, so far as not to fulfil them.

Caution 3.—He may more easily fall into a gross sin of another kind than into the same after special repentance for it, and peace spoken in the pardon of it. Because true repentance especially fortifies the heart against that sin which a man hath most repented him of ; and sincerity lies more in watching over that sin than any other ; so, says David, Ps. xviii., 'I was upright, and kept myself from mine iniquity,' that especial sin which was eminently his sin. A man's arm that hath been broke will, if well set, rather break in some other place than where it was broke at first. Hence sometimes it falls out that that which was a godly man's bosom-sin before conversion continues not to be so after ; but another steps up in the room of it, by reason that he then endeavoureth to wash out that great stain most, and spendeth the most of the fuller's soap to purge himself from it, and so becomes ever after most watchful over it, and sets in this, his weakest place, the strongest garrison, and a watch, to prevent the enemy. And as an act of some presumptuous sin, though it inclines the heart more to all sin than before, yet especially to commit that kind of sin again rather than any other ; so, on the contrary, is it in a sound and solemn repentance for some especial sin, and in the endeavouring to mortify some especial member of the body of sin, (to mortify which, not only in the bulk and general, but also particularly and apart in the several members of it, the Holy Ghost exhorts. Col. iii. 5,) though thereby the whole habit of the body of sin is purged and weakened, yet that particular sin which we aim especially to have mortified, is, through God's blessing, more subdued than any other. We see idolatry was the sin which the people of Israel relapsed into again and again ; yet when they were once thoroughly humbled by the captivity for it, they never returned to it, of all sins else, not to this day : so as it may be said, as was foretold haply in another case, Ezek. xvi. 43, 'Thou shalt not commit this lewdness, of all thy abominations.' Jonah, though he would haply never run away from God again after his jail delivery out of the whale's belly, yet, immediately after peace spoken to his heart, he falls into a sin of another kind, into a passion of extreme anger and peevishness, and quarrelling against God.

And the reason of this especial tenderness to fall into the same sin is, because the conscience looks upon a relapse into that sin to be more heinous than into any other sin of another kind, because of that aggravation of it which thereby would stain and dye it ; and although a sin of another kind shews the variety of corruption more, yet this is more against the power and work of repentance itself, which was particularly exercised about that sin ; and also breaks and dissolveth all bands of a man's vows, covenants, prayers, &c., made against it in particular, and so is made more grievous. And this we may see in Ezra's humbling himself for that great sin of the people, in joining themselves in marriage with the people of the land, when he did set himself to humble himself for them, together with those 'that feared God,' chap. ix. 4. What a hideous apprehension of the heinousness of that sin, if

they should again fall into it, did that day's repentance raise his heart up unto? as appears, ver. 14, 'Should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with them, wouldest thou not destroy us till thou hadst consumed us, and till there was no escaping?' Into which sin yet the people did again fall, after they had repented of it with a solemn confession and promise of amendment, which is recorded chap. x. 11, 12, &c.; yet they returned to it again the second time, as we find in Malachi, who lived the last of the prophets, and after this prayer of Ezra. For, chap. ii. 11, the prophet says, 'An abomination is committed in Jerusalem, for Judah hath married the daughter of a strange god;' and then follows the aggravation, ver. 13, 'This ye have done again,'—that is, the second time, and in that respect are challenged to deal treacherously, and that also in respect they had repented of it the first time,—'covering the altar with tears, with weeping, and with crying out,' as Malachi there speaks, so as 'God regardeth not your offerings any more.' And therefore, also, Ps. lxxviii. 40, 'How oft did they,' saith he, as aggravating their sins, by murmuring 'provoke the Lord?' and, Num. xiv. 22, God reckons up and mentions the times of their sinning, how often they had thus sinned, as an aggravation of them; 'they have tempted me these ten times.'

Caution 4.—He may fall into the same sin again and again, until he hath recovered himself and his peace fully by a thorough repentance, but yet seldom after. Lot committed incest two nights together; but the orifice of his lust was not yet stopped by repentance, the wound was not closed, and so bled again afresh; but when it is healed once, and the heart made perfect with God, and divorced from that sin, and entered into communion with God again, then though it may fall out, yet a man more hardly returns. A woman that is gone from her husband may play the whore a long while with him she ran away withal, till her husband fetches her again: but to run often away, after receiving again, is intolerable. That is not so ordinary in God's child.

Caution 5.—Though we can hardly set limits to say when, or when not, this shall fall out from the degrees of men's repentings,—as that if they have such or such a degree of repentance, then they fall no more,—yet we may further consider a difference of their returnings to God and repentings, and of God's speaking peace:—

(1.) Of their repentings. Some are more imperfect, and but, as it were, thawings of the mind a little, by means of a little sunshine of God's love: some are more thorough and deep, that recover a man, and put him into a sound and healthful estate. As, for example, a man in an ague hath well days, yet his fits return, and it may be they leave him for a month or so, and yet they take him again, as at spring and autumn; which is because all this while his body is not thoroughly recovered to a state of health: so is it with a man's heart, in respect of his lusts; though he may have many well days, wherein he may eat his meat, and receive sweetness in the word and ordinances, yet at times his distempers and aguish fits return, he being aguish still. But in the end, after the peace of God hath more thoroughly established his heart, he attains to some settled, constant victory over it; and when it doth not prevail to victory, such aguish fits end usually in consumptions, in which long agues often end. As in temporaries, in whom, sin overcoming God's striving with them, it eats all good beginnings out; but if they belong to God, then usually that aguish distemper is, in the end, by a more thorough repentance, so healed as that they attain to more victory and security against it than any other sin: that as in those other kind of

tentations, it often falls out that that which a man doubted of most he comes in the end to be most assured of, and to doubt no more ; so also here a man becomes most freed from that sin he was long exercised with of all others. So also—

(2.) For God's dealings with his, there is much difference therein to be found. There are some kinds of speaking peace by God, and meltings of the heart of his people, which yet are not of that force as to overcome, but wherein God doth but, as it were, strive with them ; which strivings do ever and anon work their hearts to a repentance, and that true and serious ; which yet is not so deep and thorough, nor so healing the heart at the bottom, as it should. For God sometimes useth more imperfect kind of strivings, even with his own children, about some particular sin they are to leave, which do not so fully at first prevail and overcome in them ; which God doth, to let them see the running issue of their natures, how grace would run out at it, (as the Apostle speaks, Heb. ii. 1,) and overcome grace in them, if he should let it alone : and so lets out upon his child, after many years, some lust which had been long down, which puts him to it exceedingly, so that he is in hazard to be undone, and is put into fears of it ; and yet God visiteth his spirit by fits, and, *per intervalla*, at times strives with him. And though he falls, yet he puts under his hand, and gives him well days, and some comfortable visitations ; yet such as are not deep enough to work him fully off from it. For as God strives with wicked men, so he sometimes strives with his own also ; which may seem to be the true meaning of that speech, Gen. vi., where, having mentioned the sin of his own children, ver. 2, that 'the sons of God took to them wives of that wicked seed of Cain,' he says, 'My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that *he also* is but flesh.' He means not this of all mankind, for he says, *he also* is but flesh. Now, with what other creatures doth he join them in this comparison but with others of the sons of men ? So as the meaning is, I see my children, that they also are corrupt and degenerate, as well as the rest of mankind, and my Spirit hath striven with them. In which striving God lets them see how, if he did not in the end shew forth his free love to the full, in the rescuing of them and healing their backsliding, they would be undone. So as, in the end, through his grace, which is sufficient, they obtain the greatest conquest over that lust of any other ; when the heart is once thoroughly awakened, and settled in a thorough peace. And as those doubts they were most troubled with once—which though they had at times some light against, yet by fits did still arise—are yet in the end so overcome as they arise no more, but they enjoy the greatest freedom from them ; so is it often herein. And these strivings to not overcoming I resemble to the thawings of the ice in a great frost, as when in the daytime the sun shines, and in the sunshine it thaweth a little, but yet so as at night, or in the shade, it freezeth ; when sometimes also the weather begins to change for a night, and yet falls a-freezing again : so here there is not such a thorough shedding abroad the love of God in the heart as should make a thorough general thaw, to the purpose, as we say ; and so, when the heat of that is withdrawn, it freezeth again ; but in the end there comes a more thorough and general thaw and change, that carries all away, melts the heart, and so alters the temper and constitution of the weather, as I may so speak, as it freezeth no more. And such a thawing of his heart had David when Nathan came to him, and not before ; though it may be he had those lesser relentings often before.

But let those that are in such a case take heed they be not hardened through the deceitfulness of sin ; and of all the times that pass over you in

your lives, these are the most climacterial and critical, and most dangerous. For God will not always strive, but if thou beest his child, if such thawings will not do it, he will use some great afflictions, in the end to divorce the heart and thy sin; his love will one way or other overcome thee, and in the end prevail. As when Israel went on stubbornly in the way of his heart, says God, 'I have seen his ways, and will heal him and guide him,' Isa. lvii. 18; and the Lord may so heal thee as those lusts, of all other, shall not in that gross manner break forth any more. And in those times when God dealeth thus with him, a man will after say, that in such passages of his life he had more free love spent on him than in all his lifetime, before or after; and when he is freed and healed, he will be more thankful and fearful than ever before, or than otherwise he would have been, and so get ground by his stumblings. If any of you, being now in such a conflict as this, in such a vicissitude and chance of war, if yet thou findest a constant fight against thy sin, and that those breakings and meltings of thy heart by God do win ground of it, and that the comforts and hope which at times are vouchsafed do strengthen 'and stablish thy heart in well-doing,' as 2 Thess. ii. 17, and make thee more fearful every time thou risest than ever, so as to look upon another fit, if it should come, (which, knowing the deceitfulness of the heart, thou fearest,) as the fit of some great sickness, lest it should return again; esteeming it as the greatest cross that can befall thee, which thou wouldest buy off with thy blood; and bleedest most of all to think that thou hast so unconstant a heart, which as it hath abused God's love formerly, so thou fearest will do so again;—if thus thou go on to fight it out, the love of God will in the end overcome in thee. But if thou findest that those encouragements from God do, through thy corruption, (which turns God's grace into wantonness,) nourish thy lusts, and make thee less fearful against the next time, and thy heart harder and secure, and to slight sin more, because thou hast been so oft visited from on high, and pardoned; thy case is dangerous, and may prove desperate.

Caution 6.—Though he may return, yet not presently: Luke v. 39, 'He that hath tasted old wine, doth not straightway drink and desire new'—not whilst the love of God, and the taste and relish of it, is fresh in his mouth. When the impression is worn out indeed, and begins to be forgotten, then haply he may return.

Use.—To conclude with the use of this point: If it be folly to run into the same sin, though we repent of it afterwards, then what folly is it in them that utterly fall away, and after they have been enlightened, and tasted of the good word of God, then fall again to the pleasures of sin, and never repent of them? as many do that come and try a little what is in religion and the ways of God, and then return again to their vomits, and never return to piety again. 'Foolish souls, who hath bewitched you? Are ye so foolish that, having begun in the Spirit, ye end in the flesh?' as Gal. iii. 3. Folly indeed, to spend the harvest of your time in seeking God, and then to leave him when you are about to take leave of the pleasures of sin! Alas, poor souls! whither will ye go? Do you ever think to have such a God again? 'Thou hast the words of eternal life,' said the disciples to Christ; and as Saul said to his servants, to keep them from falling away unto David, 'Can the son of Jesse give you vineyards, and make you captains of thousands?' 1 Sam. xxii. 7: so, Can the world give you that peace that I can give you? (may Christ say to you :) yea, and heaven besides hereafter? Is the devil, with all the wages of sin you post after, able to make you amends? You thereby dishonour God in returning to sin, and bring an evil report

upon the good land, and discredit your master in changing your service ; but withal you befool yourselves most, 'you return to folly.' For even that which you think to gain the world's good word and opinion by, even that you lose ; for though they make a spoil of you, and triumph in such, and glory in their flesh a while, yet they never inwardly think well of such a one, nor truly love him. A backslider is like lukewarm water, having been once heated, which good men spue out, and evil men regard not ; for what use can, indeed, be made of it? 'Like salt that hath lost its savour, it is good for nothing but the dunghill.' Like one that hath been married, but lives divorced, she is undone for her marriage ever after. Such is the condition of those that fall away. You who have but turned unto folly, and are not grown to a despising and despiting God's ways, 'Return, O Shulamite, return.' And you that have peace and communion with God, take heed you do not lose him : you will never have such a God again.