

RECONCILIATION BY THE BLOOD OF CHRIST.

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A SERMON.

And (having made peace through the blood of his cross) by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.—COL. I. 20.

THAT ‘God was, in Christ, reconciling the world to himself,’ is the sum of, and the theme which the gospel dilates upon, 2 Cor. v. 19; and the title the apostle gives therefore to the doctrine of the gospel is, ‘The word of reconciliation, to wit, that God was in Christ,’ &c. ; that is, that God the Father had from everlasting made this his special business, which he hath plotted, and been desirous to bring about; and that though ‘all things are of him,’ ver. 18, yet this above all the rest. And that God the Father hath appointed Christ as the means to accomplish it, with full satisfaction made to his justice. ‘God was in Christ,’ &c.

God the Father’s part I have already handled out of another scripture, more proper to that argument, and how far it was advanced by him.

First, By taking up a strong and unalterable resolution, to gather in one the sons of men, scattered from him, Eph. i. 9, 10. It is declared to be ‘the mystery of his will, which he purposed in himself, according to his good pleasure;’ and as this text tells us, ‘it pleased him.’ It had been his full meaning, his everlasting intent and purpose, yea, a matter of the greatest delight to him; as Jer. ix. 24, shewing mercy, on the earth, not in hell, therein is my delight. This purpose was fed with delight, and therefore vanished not. And the greater men are, the greater delights they use to have; and this being God’s, must needs be a matter of infinite moment and consequence, his heart being in it so much, and he being set upon it.

Secondly, This purpose lay not idle in him, but set him a-work, his wisdom a-work, and out of those his infinite depths, found out and invented a way and means of effecting our reconciliation, even the incarnation and death of his own Son; before the wound was given, provided a plaster and sufficient remedy to salve all again, which otherwise had been past finding out. For we, who could never have found out a remedy for a cut finger (had not God prescribed and appointed one), could much less for this. It being a case of that difficulty, supposing his justice resolving to have full satisfaction; which, as it passed all the creature’s power to make, so it passed their skill and thoughts to find out how and by whom it might be effected. The devils, they could not imagine any way, no more for us

than for themselves, and therefore tempted man, thinking him, when he had sinned, sure enough, and hell gates so strongly locked, that no art could find or make a key to open them, a power to break them open. And Adam, poor man! he trembled, knew not which way to turn himself, and thought God would have flown upon him presently. The good angels, they know it but by the church, Eph. iii. 10. In this strait aforehand God set his depths a-work to find out one, in and by whom all this might be accommodated, and (to allude to Abraham's speech) 'provided himself a sacrifice' unknown to us.

Thirdly, It hath been shewn that he, to manifest his seriousness in it, called his Son to it; whom,

Fourthly, We have shewn at his entreaty to have been fully willing, and undertook it.

I shall at this time, in handling of these words, give the second part of this story; and that is, to lay open Christ's part, in whom it now lies to be performed. And to this end I have chosen this text, which tells us that all fulness dwells in him for the effecting of it. As,

1. A fulness of fitness.
2. Of abilities.
3. Of faithfulness.
4. Of righteousness, now it is performed.
5. Of acceptation of his person, and what he hath done.
6. A fulness of duration of the merit of what he hath done for ever.

1. First, He had fulness of fitness in him, being fitted so with such a body as hath been described; a fulness of fitness in his person, to be a mediator and reconciler for us.

Now the choice of a fit person, and his fitness, is more especially required and respected in a business of mediation than in anything else, avails as much as wisdom, power, or anything else; for indeed it is the foundation of all, and often for want of a fit person, the force of a mediation is enervated, and avails not, though other sufficiencies concur to effect it. Now to shew this peculiar fitness, 'A mediator,' the apostle says, 'is a mediator not of one,' but of two parties at least, Gal. iii. 20.

The parties here, betwixt whom reconciliation is to be made, are God and man, 1 Tim. ii. 5. Why? Can you then have a fitter person than one that is both God and man? And such a person is Jesus Christ become, that he might be a fit mediator. 'There is,' says the apostle, 'but one God, and but one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.' There could be but one so fit a mediator. To this end, therefore, the apostle tells us, in Heb. ii. 16, that 'he took the seed of Abraham to himself,' *ἐπ' ἡμεῶν ἑαυτῶν*, took our nature into one person with himself; called therefore a 'tabernacle, which God pitched, and not men,' Heb. viii. 2, and chap. ix. 11, 'not of this building,' of the hands of men. Men must have no hand in it. For this is required to fit a mediator, or an umpire, Job ix. 33, 'that he be able to lay his hand on both;' which phrase notes out,

(1.) That he be an indifferent person between both, ready to distribute with an equal hand, to both their due.

(2.) That he hath an interest, a hand, or prevailing stroke with both; power to deal between both.

(3.) That he be fit to communicate to them, for the benefit of his mediation else is vain. Now all these are in Christ, as thus fitted.

(1.) For the first, Heb. ii. 16, the apostle shewing how he took our nature on him, not of angels; in the 17th verse he gives this as the reason,

‘It behoved him,’ &c. And why did it behove him? ‘That he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.’ That is, hereby he comes to be a fit, meet high priest. ‘It behoved him,’ *ᾧ πρέπει*, which notes out fitness. And why fit? The words shew, there were two parties whose cause was to be committed to him, God and the people’s. There were things pertaining to God, who was the party wronged by the sins of the people; and there was reconciliation or atonement for their sins to be made. God, he was to have his due, though they had reconciliation; therefore, in regard of the things pertaining to God, *faithfulness* was required; in regard of things pertaining to the people, *mercy*. If he had been only man, he might have ended it with detriment and wrong to God.

That therefore he might be faithful to him, it was fit he should be God, and so tender of his cause, that he might see such a satisfaction first should be made as was his due, and what pertained to him; for God put all the glory of his justice into his hand. He had need be God who had such a trust committed him; God would not trust a mere man again.

And, secondly, he had our souls and salvation committed also to him; and therefore it was behoveful for us that he should be man, to be merciful and pitiful to us; that he might be sensible of the pains human nature was to be put to, and so, out of experimental kindly pity, moved to make an atonement.

(2.) Secondly, Hereby he was one that was peculiarly fit to deal with both, and to have a hand and stroke in both, and both with him.

For now, as Zech. xiii. 7, he is become ‘the man, God’s fellow;’ and so, more than man. He had not else been meet to deal with God; it had been robbery in a mere man to have arrogated such an equality, which yet was not in him, Phil. ii; for as God says, Jer. xxx. 21, who but he could ‘draw nigh to me,’ so near as thus, to mediate? Who durst attempt, or presume, or engage his heart to do it? But him, being my fellow, ‘I will cause to draw nigh unto me;’ and there is no unfitness, no disparagement in it, which, if he had been but a creature, would have been.

And, secondly, he being the man, God’s fellow, we may draw nigh to him, and he to us. For why, as in the same Jer. xxx. 2, ‘he comes out of the midst of us.’ So also, Heb. iv. 14, 15, see what a fit high priest, by this, he is made for us, so as we may boldly draw near, ver. 16, to the throne of grace; that is, seeing we have a great high priest, not simply a high priest, but a great high priest, no less than Jesus, the Son of God, who may draw nigh to God for us.

But you might say, This is too high a priest, too great for us to draw nigh to; therefore he adds, ‘But yet he is not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities,’ that is, is a man as we are, and therefore subject to the same feeling of pain and miseries, which (as God) he is not; and therefore we may come boldly to him and make our moan, &c., as in the 16th verse.

(3.) And, thirdly (which is a reason beyond all this), by this peculiar fitness of his, he is fitted to communicate the benefit of his mediation to us, which without it he had not done; and therefore this fitness of his is a matter of great consequence and moment.

Now the benefit we were to receive by his mediation, was to have righteousness from him, so as to appear in God’s sight without sin, and so to be brought into favour, and that so great as to be the sons of God. Now, in that the Son of God took our nature, he was fitted to do this; for,

That we might have his righteousness communicated to us, it was fit that our nature should be a fountain or cistern of it first, else what peculiar claim could we make to it more than other creatures? Heb. ii. 11. this reason is given, 'He that sanctifieth, and they that are sanctified, are one,' that is, *ἐξ ἑνός, ejusdem naturæ*. Had they not been so, he could not so fitly have been made righteousness and sanctification to us; and therefore (says he, John xvii. 19), 'For their sakes sanctify I myself,'—that is, my human nature, which he calls himself, as one person with himself. for his Deity was sanctified from everlasting—'that they might be sanctified,' that is, partakers of the same righteousness that I have. And this is one reason he gives in Heb. ii. why, *ὥραλε, 'it behoved him,'* ver. 10, that so he might sanctify us, by first sanctifying our nature; for it was fit that that nature which had sinned should be sanctified, 'to condemn sin in the flesh,' as the apostle reasons, Rom. viii., and so now it is fitly imputed to us, as done for us; and therefore a redeemer in the old law was to be a kinsman, he had right of redeeming only, Lev. xxv. 25 and Ruth iv. 4-7, and therefore the Hebrew word *Goel* signifieth a redeemer and a kinsman. And Christ therefore, that he might have right of redeeming and sanctifying, and they a right in his redemption, it was fit they should partake of one. Wherefore, ver. 14 of Heb ii., 'Forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood,' &c., he also, that so he might be of a kindred to them, and rightfully call them brethren, ver. 11, and to make them sons of God, as himself was, John i. 12.

And hence now, by reason of the want of this very fitness, the benefit of his mediation, so as to convey righteousness, is not intended to angels; and therefore it is exclusively added, ver. 16, 'He took not on him the nature of angels;' they had not this benefit by it, because not their nature. So as this fitness is a thing God much looked at and respected: for though of never so great a value in itself, yet doth good but to those for whom he was then so properly and peculiarly a fit mediator, namely, men.

In a word, take this for a sure rule, that though the intention of the merits of Christ did arise from his sufficiency and abilities to mediate, yet the extension from his proper fitness; and therefore to none but as* men, whose nature he partook of.

First, We see he hath fulness of fitness in him; let us now see if he hath fulness of abilities and sufficiencies in him for this great work, which is a distinct thing from the former; for in the old law the next akin was always most fit to redeem, but it may be not always able.

2. Secondly, Christ hath a fulness of ability to effect this great business, to make a perfect mediation every way satisfactory. And surely if he hath all fulness in him to this end (as in Col. i. 19), he therefore wants no ability and sufficiency hereunto to make a perfect saviour, as he is called, Heb. v. 9. And this may be demonstrated from what went before.

For, *first*, God called him to this great work. Now, if he had not been fully able to undertake and go through with it, God would never have pitched upon him. Men may call one to a place who may prove insufficient, because they often know not what men's abilities are when they call, neither can they give abilities by calling; but God calls none but he knows their sufficiency already, or in calling makes them such.

Now, God knowing Christ's sufficiency, called him to it, Ps. xlv. 7. Because he hated iniquity and loved righteousness, therefore he anointed him to be a head; because he was therefore able to fulfil all righteousness,

* Qu. 'us'?—ED.

and not to sin ; that is, he was armed with power to execute the office of priesthood for ever, and overcome all difficulties ; and therefore he is said to have been made a priest, with power of an endless life, and not after the law of a carnal commandment, as other priests were. Their office, he says, was weak, and not able to bring things to perfection, as it was not able to satisfy God ; but he with the power of an endless life ; because Christ had power enough to survive the encounter of his Father's wrath, and live for ever ; to go through-stitch with the work and bring it to perfection, and not *succumbere* or sink under it.

And, *secondly*, in that God called him, he undertook to make him able. Besides that God knew Christ able, and therefore called him, it may be further said, that in calling him he undertook to make him able. Men, if they find not men able for places when they call them, cannot give abilities ; but God doth give abilities by calling : Isa. xlii. 1, 4, ' Behold my servant whom I uphold ; mine elect ' (or chosen one), ver. 6, ' whom I have called in righteousness ' (says God) ; that is, I have called him to this office, and that in righteousness, put him not upon it unwillingly ; and him I chose of all that ever were or shall be, and he is my servant in it, and therefore certainly I will uphold him in it ; and therefore (as it is ver. 6) he promiseth that he will hold his hand up that he sink not, even as Christ held up Peter from sinking, and will keep him so (as ver. 4). ' He shall not fail,' or fall short to accomplish the work of mediation, in the least tittle ; ' nor shall he be discouraged,' or (as it is in the original) ' not be broken ;' and he was to undergo that which would have broken the backs of men and angels, and pushed them to hell. But he shall not be broken, but backed with all the power that God hath, ' who made the heavens,' &c., as it follows, ver. 5.

And, *thirdly*, you heard how Christ was willing to undertake it, and therefore surely knew himself able to go through with it, for otherwise he would never have undertaken it. A wise man will not undertake an enterprise that he is not able to manage or go through with, and Christ much less, who is the wisdom of his Father, Col. ii. He will not do as a foolish builder, that begins and sets upon a work which he is not able to finish. What wise man will enter into bond for another for more than he is worth himself, and so lie in prison for ever ? No wise man will, much less Christ ; therefore surely he was able.

And, *fourthly*, in that he is God as well as man (as you have heard), therefore surely he must needs be able. If it had been possible his Father should forsake him, as he complained he did afford him no succour, no support, but leave him to himself ; nay, do his utmost against him, and make known the power of his wrath, as indeed he did ; why, he is able to uphold himself, for ' the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily in him,' Col. ii. 9. Mark it, he hath not only some gifts of the Godhead, or virtue from the Godhead dwelling in him, and so supporting him, but the fulness of the Godhead itself ; and this not lodging there as a friend or sojourner, but knit to and residing in him, as a householder, for ever, that will be sure to keep possession for ever ; and so nearly knit, as that Godhead and manhood make one person *bodily*, that is, personally ; as *anima*, by Hebrewism, signifies person. So human nature and God make one person. Therefore he, having power, must put it forth to the utmost to preserve human nature from sinking in this business ; and all must sink if it sink.

Now, one of his names, Isa. ix. 7, is, that he is ' the mighty God.'

Why ? First, he must fulfil all righteousness : ' It becomes us' (says

Christ) 'to fulfil all righteousness,' of moral law and ceremonial, Mat. iii. 15. Why, and that is least of all, for this angels in heaven perform; and Christ, if he had been but a mere man, filled with all grace as he was, John i. 16, would have done that, having the Spirit so without measure, John iii. 34. Only this, if he had been a mere man, it had not been a righteousness sufficient and able to mediate for us, for it would but have justified himself; there must therefore be a further ability than any creature hath to go to this. But he being God also, and therefore Lord of the moral law, as he is said to be Lord of the Sabbath, and so not subject to the law; that he should take on him the form of a servant to the law, and be made under the law, who made and gave it, Gal. iv. 4, and become obedient to every tittle of it, as he did; this made that active righteousness of his of infinite value, able to mediate for us. Therefore he is called 'Jehovah our righteousness.'

Secondly, As he must be able to do and fulfil the law thus, so to suffer also; for, Heb. ii. 10, he is made a perfect Saviour through suffering; and then says Christ, 'I shall be perfected,' and 'without shedding of blood there is no remission,' Heb. ix. 24. He cannot save a man unless he die, but must enjoy heaven alone: John xii. 24, 'Unless a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it remains alone;' so Christ, if he had not died. And being God he could not indeed, but being man. He would easily enough do that (you will say), nothing easier than to die. But yet, if his death be a mediating death, he must be able to offer up himself in death; be his own sacrifice, altar, priest; and borrow nothing, and all at once; and that no creature could. But now being God also, he was able to offer up himself, needed no other priest, Heb. ix. 14. 'Through the eternal Spirit he offered up himself;' yea, and find a sacrifice also himself, offering up his body, Heb. x. 10; and 'his soul also an offering for sin,' struggling under the wrath of God, Isa. liii. 10; yea, and be the altar himself, Heb. xiii. 10.

But, thirdly, there is a business of greater difficulty yet behind, that exceeds the power of any creature, yea, of all, which will draw out the power of God indeed; and that is, that he must rise again as a conqueror over death, overcome hell and God's wrath, and not lie wrestling under them to eternity, for till then God's wrath would not be satisfied; for if he had lain by it, and been kept in prison, then it had been a sign the debt was not paid. If ever therefore he will justify us by his death, he must overcome and rise again, or else we should 'be still in our sins,' 1 Cor. xv. 13; and this no creature could ever do. God's wrath would have held them tugging work to eternity, and they could never have risen again, nor stirred. He that overcomes that must be as strong as God himself; yea, and he must do this himself, by his own power too. It were not enough to be raised up, as Lazarus was, by the power of another. That will not serve. For that power that raised him must first satisfy and overcome God's wrath, and break open the prison doors.

Now, if another power than his own had done it, that party had been mediator, and not he. But now he being God, he is able to do all this, and to do it himself also. For being God, that power was able to raise him up, and to loose the pains of death; and it was impossible he should be held of them. They were the pains of death, namely, the wrath of God, which would have sped all the creatures in the world; and which pains would not have let him go till they were loosened and overcome; for, if possible, they would have held him, but being God, it was not possible.

He will take hell gates, as another Samson, and throw them off the hinges, and carry them away, and swallow up death in victory: 'Destroy this temple' (says he, John ii. 19), 'and I have power to raise it up;' I, myself. The body could not raise itself indeed, therefore if he had been mere man he could not have done it; but that Spirit, the eternal Godhead, could, 1 Pet. iii. 18. He was able, you see, to this work of mediation.

3. Thirdly, Christ had faithfulness in him not to fail in the performance, Heb. iii. 2. It is said, 'He was faithful to him that appointed him.' God did appoint (as ye heard) and trust him, and therefore he failed not in his expectation; for God otherwise had not pitched upon him. And the reasons which may evince he would be so are,

First, He being God, and having passed his word to his Father, he could not but be faithful and true in it; for with God 'is no variableness, nor shadow of turning,' James i. 17. And plead inability he could not, and his Father that had appointed him would not release him: Heb. vii. 21, 'He swore, and would not repent, that he should be a priest.'

Secondly, It concerned himself to be faithful in the performances, for otherwise, as the case stood, he himself must have lain by it; as a man that is surety for another (as Heb. vii. 22, 'He was made a surety'), he made it his own debt; and we could not, nor were able, and he therefore undertook it; and therefore it concerned him to discharge it, and to pay the utmost farthing.

Thirdly, God, upon this ground, took his word and bond, and had let thousands of debtors go free, and saved millions under the Old Testament, upon his bare word; ere ever he came to do it, Heb. ix. 15, he is there called 'the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the transgressions under the old testament,' &c. Many a man's sins then were put upon his score, and God should be a great loser by him; and therefore it was necessary he should discharge those debts: Rom. iii. 25, he says, that 'God had set him forth to be a propitiation, to declare his righteousness,' or faithfulness, 'for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.' There seem to be two arguments: 1. That God had pardoned and forborne many sins, before he came into the world, he had been at great expenses of mercy; and he should be a loser if he came not to be a propitiation for them. 2. Upon Christ's promise to him, he had made a promise of Christ to the world; and therefore, to shew his faithfulness and truth, he sent him. To make good his Father's faithfulness, he must needs be faithful.

Fourthly, When he came down from heaven, and took our nature upon him, he left his glory as a mortgage or pawn for to make his promise and bond good, never to take it up again and look his Father in the face in glory till he had performed it; for so much that speech of his implies, John xvii. ver. 4 and 5, 'Now glorify me with the glory I had with thee before the world was.' That same *now* having reference to finishing the work in the 4th verse, implies that till then he was not to reassume it.

4. Therefore, fourthly,

He hath done it, and fully performed it; so his own words are in the same John xvii. 4, 'I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do;' and hath all fulness of righteousness dwelling in him, to make peace and reconcile us, Col. i. ver. 20. For,

First; Whereas God had a bond against us, Col. ii. 15, till that was discharged we must lie by it. He hath discharged that debt, paid an equivalent ransom to it, ἀντίλυτρον, 1 Tim. ii. 6, and cancelled that bond,

Col. ii. 13. And whereas we were to die, bodies and souls, he offered both his body, Heb. x. 10, and also his soul as an 'offering for sin,' Isa. liii. 10, and 'poured it out to death,' v. 12, whereof the two elements of bread and wine are signs and seals to us, though both conveying one and the same whole Christ, yet represented to us as having his body broken in the bread, and his soul poured out in the wine; the life or soul lying in the blood, it signified the suffering of his soul, which sacrifice being offered up by the eternal Spirit (that is, the Godhead), who was both priest and altar, Heb. ix. 14, therefore sanctified the gift or sacrifice, as the altar did, Mat. xxiii. 19, and therefore, being the blood of the Son of God, it cleanseth from all sin, 1 John i. 7. Yea, and so perfect a satisfaction is it, that he needed to do it but once: Heb. x. 14, 'By once offering he perfected for ever them that are sanctified;' that is, purchased a perfect peace and final discharge, and that so perfect, that God doth herewith not only rest satisfied, but also finds a sweet smelling savour, Eph. v. 2, so as the scent of sin cannot come up into his nostrils.

Secondly; He hath fulfilled all the active righteousness of the law; for so indeed it 'became him,' who is our high priest, 'who is holy, harmless, undefiled,' &c., Heb. vii. 26. So when he was to lay down his life, and pay the last sum and part of the payment, he says, John xvii. 4, 'I have finished the work thou gavest me to do;' and John viii. 29, 'I do always the things that please thee;' and, 'I came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it,' even every *iota* of it. For (says he, Mat. iii. 15), speaking of the necessity of his being baptized, which was a branch of righteousness, 'Suffer it to be so, for it becomes us thus to fulfil all righteousness,' namely, necessary for justification, which I add, because some parts of the law he had no occasion to fulfil: as not the duty of a husband to a wife, nor of a father to a child, because they were not compatible with his condition and office of mediatorship; and which are rather duties of a particular state and condition of life, than of the nature of man in general, which he undertook for. That therefore, as we say, it was not necessary he should in his passive obedience take on him the several personal infirmities and diseases which befall men, but only those which are common to man's nature, as hunger, sleep, &c., which he did; so is it in his active obedience also. It was not necessary thus particularly to fulfil every such branch as is but personal; though all those he did perform more eminently, in a more transcendent manner, as the duties of a husband and a father to his spouse and children, the church.

Thirdly; And besides, as in his passive obedience he underwent the substance of those pains we were to undergo, but was not bound to all the circumstances, as of eternity, and of the place in hell, &c., so, nor in his active obedience was he bound to perform the occasional duties, which are but circumstances to man's nature, or diversified by several conditions in this world. It was enough he performed the sum and substance, of loving God and man in that eminent manner he did; love being, for substance, 'the fulfilling of the law.'

And thus it was impossible but that he should fulfil the whole law. Had he been mere man, then indeed there might have been room for a supposition, that being a creature, he might have failed; but being God, he could not, James i. 13, and therefore not fail in performing any part of it. Which obedience and fulfilling of the law being performed by one who, till he took man's nature on him, was no way subject to it; and then also was lord of the law as of the Sabbath, may be accepted for us, and we saved by it;

so as 'the righteousness of the law' is said to be 'fulfilled in us,' Rom. viii. 4, 5.

And that he hath fully performed both these is evident by this : that now he sits at the right hand of God, which is the demonstration brought by the apostle, Heb. x. 12, that he hath done whatever was requisite to perfect and consummate our peace and reconciliation, as ver. 14. For, says he, after his offering that his sacrifice, 'He sat down at the right hand of God,' or 'the Majesty on high.' Now, it is certain he had never come thither if he had not paid the debt; God would never have suffered him; for he must have lain in prison till he had paid the utmost mite. But now being got out of prison, as Isaiah speaks, chap. liii. 8, and set down on God's right hand there in heaven, surely he hath paid the debt, and if he could have broke loose and got thither, yet in heaven he would not stay, unless he had performed it; thither would the wrath of God pursue him, and there arrest him and seize on him. For when Adam had sinned, paradise could not hold him; nor would heaven hold Christ, if he owed God anything; therefore, says Christ, John xvi. 10, bringing it as an evidence of his righteousness all sufficient, and to convince the world of it, 'I go to my Father, and ye shall see me no more;' if it had been otherwise, his Father would not have received him, but sent him down again.

Fourthly; And by this his both active and passive obedience, through the acceptance of his person, who performed it, he hath completed the work of reconciliation with his Father, which, consisting of peace and good will (that is, being pacified towards us, and receiving us into favour again) as the parts of it, these two main parts of obedience serve to procure and consummate both. His blood procureth peace; so Col. i. 20, 'Having made peace through the blood of his cross;' that is the first. But yet, because when peace is made, the party may say, Though I am at peace, and pardon the traitor, yet I can never love him again or receive him into favour, as I was wont; therefore his active obedience, through the favour of the person performing it, procures the manifestation of good will also, to make us complete and perfect friends. Therefore to reconcile in that Col. i. 20 is made more than simply to make peace. Peace is but the foundation of it; for '*having* made peace to reconcile us,' &c., says the text; and the blood of his cross goes to make peace; this other serves to restore us to his lost favour, to make us accepted, and all through him. Therefore there lies the emphasis, as you may observe it in that Col. i. 20, 'By him I say;' it comes in twice there.

5. Therefore, *fifthly*; add to all this, there is a fulness of acceptance of the person with God who performed all this. For he that brings creatures into favour must be more beloved than a creature; and in matters of mediation, the chief thing lies in the graciousness of the mediator, with his interest in the party offended; and if either his love or money will procure full friendship for us, he will use both. His money (you see) is paid, he hath laid it down, a sufficient price; and besides, he is infinitely beloved of his Father, so as for his sake he cannot but accept it, and love us again through him better than ever. For, Prov. viii., he is his old friend, and ancient companion, ver. 30, even before the world was, his only begotten Son, not by will but nature, the very substantial image of his person, Heb. i. 3: in whom therefore he cannot but delight, and be well pleased, as he himself from heaven hath said, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;' not with him only, but in him with others; for therefore he bids us hear him and believe him; and if it had not been that he is well pleased with us in him,

it had no way concerned us. Therefore, in Eph. i. 9, we are said to be 'graciously accepted in him, as the beloved one of his Father,' as it is there. And though he secretly bore good will to us before, yet in that his beloved, he hath *made* us graciously accepted, made way for owning us, and shining graciously upon us, in and through him, whereas without him, he would never have afforded us one good look.

And though in Adam we were beloved, having his image in us in him, yet infinitely more in Christ: Rom. v. 17, 'We receive abundance of grace, and righteousness, and life in Christ;' and therefore, says Christ, John x. 10, 'I came that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.' It is a degree of comparison, and therefore with that former state of life we once had; they shall have all that life (and God's favour is our life) they once had, and more abundantly. In that Rom. v. 17, he speaks comparatively with our estate in Adam, and seems to make this the fruit of that abundance of grace and righteousness that we receive, above what in Adam we should, that we shall reign in life, be kings in heaven, to which place his righteousness would not have brought him, but served only to continue that life and degree of favour he was received into. But in him we are beloved with the same love Christ himself is: John xvii. 23, 'Thou hast loved them, as thou hast loved me;' and therefore, ver. 27, adds and makes this a further favour granted at his request, that they might be where he is, whither else they should not have come. For he ascended to prepare that place for us, and then heaven was opened, and not till then; when he said, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' We are therefore not only made friends again in heaven, but further received into a greater degree of favour than ever, and to a higher place in court.

6. But now because, in the *sixth* place, it may be said, that though for his sake we are made friends as good as ever, yet we may fall out again, a breach may come, and so the enmity become greater than ever; he may use us kindly for a while for his sake, but yet, upon some provocation, he may cast us off again, and remember all our former sins.

Therefore, sixthly, know that there is eternity and perpetuity annexed to this his mediation, to make it yet more full; and so full as nothing now can more be added; Heb. x. 14, 'By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.' His offering, though but one, yet it was a perfect one, wanting nothing; once was enough; it is of everlasting force and merit, for it perfecteth for ever. And it is not thus only in itself, but in the fruit of it to those who enjoy it, it perfecteth them for ever who are sanctified by it. There is no danger of justification, if sanctification hold out, that being the condition on our part; and therefore shewing the eternal efficacy of that one offering, he says, it perfects them who are sanctified; even that being the covenant on his part to perform in us, as well as justification is; and therefore he adds, ver. 15, 16, 17, 18, 'Whereof the Holy Ghost is a witness to us: for after he had said, This is my covenant; I will write my laws in their hearts; he says, and their sins and iniquities I will remember no more.' The sum whereof is this, that justification is eternal: 'Their iniquities will I remember no more.' And therefore sanctification is eternal also, and both he puts upon the merit of that one offering, that righteousness which hath influence into both, being eternal also, and perfects for ever; and therefore, Dan. ix. 24, he is said to finish and put an end and a seal to sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness; that is, such a righteousness as shall, through the strength and eternity of its merits, for ever put an end

to sins, and to make a reconciliation as eternal as itself is, and us friends for ever. For it is such a righteousness, that as it is of that breadth to cover millions of worlds of sins, so of that length, that no times to eternity could wear it out where it is once imputed.

And indeed the reason why it is of that length is, because it is of that sufficiency, though it be but one offering, yet it perfects for ever when it is once imputed; and till the guilt of sin can come to be of more force than the merit of his righteousness, it cannot cease to be imputed when once it is imputed. And therefore it is not said, that by reason of it, sins are remembered no more, but iniquities also, in both the forementioned places. So that when Christ ceaseth to be righteousness, then may we, when once he is made righteousness to us.

And to this end further, besides the everlastingness of his righteousness, he himself on purpose lives for ever to keep us in favour, and his righteousness in memory, and our sins in forgetfulness: Heb. vii. 24, 'This man,' says he, 'because he continueth for ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood; wherefore he is able to save to the utmost them that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.' He is able to save to the utmost; that is, the utmost of sins, be they what they will; to the utmost of times, though continued never so long. No guilt can reach so far, and to such greatness, from which he is not able to save; and he makes this as one reason of it, because he himself lives for ever, and lives on purpose to put remembrance and force into his mediation, 'He liveth to make intercession.'

He is not one that will be silent whilst he lives, never hold his peace till he have peace. 'If any man sin,' after the imputation of that righteousness, 'we have,' saith he, 'an advocate with the Father.' If sin and the devil, who is sin's advocate, plead against us, yet we have Christ our advocate, who never took any cause in hand wherein he was foiled; and this with the Father, both his and ours, who is therefore ready to hear his children pleaded for by such a Son. And if the blood of dead Abel cries, shall not the blood of living Christ speak louder? If the sin of Adam, now he is long since dead, would to eternity continue to condemn men born of him (if it might be supposed generation might last to eternity), one man after another, and never have any stint; and shall not the righteousness of him 'who is alive for evermore,' Rev. i. 18, be of force to dispel the guilt of all the sins, that can be supposed to be committed, even to eternity?

See how the apostle argues it, Rom. v. 10, 'If, when ye were enemies, ye were reconciled by his death, much more shall we be saved by his life.' He argues from the less to the greater; and the comparison is double. 1. His death and life are compared together. And, 2, our state before reconciliation and after. If after we had gone on many years in a state of enmity and rebellion, and yet were made friends through the strength of his mediation; and all that enmity forgotten and pardoned; then being made friends, it is easier for Christ to keep us so, and to get our sins still pardoned to the end of our days. And if his death was of force enough to reconcile you then, much more, being now alive, and so able to put life into the merit of his death, will he be able to keep God and you friends; and therefore, says he, in the 6th chapter 9th verse, having said at the 5th that 'we are planted into the likeness of his resurrection,' he makes the likeness and similitude to hold in this, 'knowing that Christ, being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once' (he had not died but for sin,

and then needed die but once for it); 'but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise,' says the apostle, ver. 11, 'reckon ye yourselves also dead unto sin, and alive unto God through Jesus Christ.' Make account that when Christ is out of favour, then you may be; when he is damned, you may. But he liveth ever, so shall you; for by that one death 'he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.'

USE. Now the common use or corollary from both these, what God has done, and what fulness dwells in Christ, is this, that certainly there is peace and reconciliation to be had and obtained with God by sinners and enemies to him; and this, my brethren, is the pitch,* the marrow of the gospel; such news, that as soon as it burst out, heaven and earth rang with joy again. The angels could not hold, but, as being ambitious to be the relators of it, posted down to earth to bring the first news of it: Luke ii. 13, 14, 'Peace on earth, good-will towards men.' Though you can hear it, and be no more moved than the seats you sit upon, yet when it was first preached it brought in men by troops, as voluntaries, more than the law had done: Luke xvi. 16, 'The law and the prophets were till John: but since the kingdom of God' (that is, the gospel) 'is preached, and every man presseth into it.' But now, alas! we that are daily used to the tidings of it, how little are we moved with it! How few come in upon proclamation made of it! And therefore we are fain to make it the greatest of our business to preach the law, and come with that great hammer to break your bones in pieces first, that we may then preach the gospel, as it is Isa. lxii., to the captives, and to bind up the broken-hearted, and so to make ourselves work; and this we count our misery. Yea, and this we profess before you all this day, we tremble most when we come to preach it; for we are afraid that men should still go on, and lie in their sins, which if they do, they had well nigh as good have been in hell, as in the church to hear it, because God may be provoked to swear against them that they shall never enter into his rest.

Yet because a necessity is laid upon us, not to preach only, but to preach the gospel, and that all that are brought home to God must have the knowledge of it, I return to enlarge and press the use mentioned, and shew the connection of it with what hath been delivered, and how it flows from it.

Reconciliation, I say, surely may be obtained.

First; Because God the Father so strongly purposed and intended it for some, therefore surely it may be had, for he will never go back or alter any resolution he hath so peremptorily taken up; yea, though he had not made known that his purpose to us his creatures, for 'he is not as man that he should repent;' he should be conscious to himself of imperfection if he did: and he swore (as I told you), and would not repent from everlasting, and now he hath made known this which he purposed in himself, Eph. i. 9.

Secondly; His delights were in it, and therefore are in it still, his greatest and strongest delights. Though we poor, frail creatures alter our delights daily (for indeed our delights do arise out of alteration and variety), yet he can never alter his; but what he delighted in once he delights in still; and surely if the thoughts of making us friends aforehand possessed his heart so deeply and so long, much more now, when he shall come to the performance and execution of it, and to reconcile us actually; to see that done, the thoughts of which so pleased him. Do we think that such thoughts, so deeply set, and fed with delight, can vanish or be forgotten? Surely no. It is the day he longs for, which he hath seen a-coming and rejoiced in,

* Qu. 'pith?'—ED.

and said in himself, 'When will it be?' Jer. xiii. 27. And in the shewing mercy and dispensing it, 'I do delight,' says he, Jer. ix. 24. No request therefore or suit pleaseth him so, or agrees more with his heart, than suing for mercy and pardon, and to be friends with him; he is grieved when he is hindered by our impenitency from enjoying his delights. And then,

Thirdly; He spake to his Son himself, unbespoke to by us, and made known his mind to him, and called and anointed him to this work, and with the greatest vehemency, when he swore concerning him, that he should be a priest; and having expressed so much seriousness, as then he did to him, when he swore and said he would not repent, Heb vii. 21. For his gifts and calling, and oaths, are without repentance.

And, *Fourthly*; In that his Son did as willingly undertake it, and now hath also undergone it, and a covenant having passed between them, he is much more engaged to accept it. For to what end did he trouble his Son to come down from heaven, and to take our shame and frailties, and to die? What, in vain? as the apostle elsewhere argues, Gal. ii. 21. What, to spend his strength for nought? as Isa. xlix. 4. A shame it were to take such a journey to no purpose. No; God made him a promise, Isa. liii. 10, 11, that he should 'see his seed, and see the travail of his soul, and he should be satisfied; for my righteous servant shall justify many;' and this because he underwent so much grief and sorrow so willingly, as it is in the former part of the chapter; and the joy of this was it made him undergo it so willingly: Heb. xii. 2, 'For the joy that was set before him.' And that his joy was this, that he should 'prolong his days,' and though he died in the travail, yet he should see the travail of his soul; and as a woman, though she be in great pains, yet her joy is 'that a man-child is born into the world;' so it is with Christ, that many should be justified by him, as it follows there, for nothing else will satisfy Christ. And that he should 'divide the spoil with the strong,' ver. 12, 'because he poured out his soul to death'; that is, he triumphed over hell and death, and in the conquest spoiled principalities and powers, and obtained heaven and everlasting righteousness, by which he himself was not made the richer. God therefore allows him to divide it, and give it away to others. And God considereth also how that in this work he was his servant: 'My righteous servant' (saith he) 'shall justify many;' and he was *his* servant, did *his* business in it; and should he have no wages nor reward? Yes, the only reward which he seeks for is the salvation and justification of his elect, and those God hath given him. Isa. lxii. 11, when Zion is saved, and his salvation of them cometh, it is added that 'his reward is with him, and his work before him,' that being the reward of his work; and Isa. xlix. 4, when Christ complained that in regard of Israel, that is, the Jews, 'I have,' in a manner, 'spent my strength in vain,' so few of them are called, that my reward and work is with my God to give me wages. What is that? Ver. 6, 'I will give thee for a light to the Gentiles, and that thou mayest be my salvation to the ends of the earth;' and 'I have heard thee in an acceptable time;' and 'I will give thee for a covenant to the Gentiles, to say to the prisoners, Go free.' This is God's answer to him there.

Fifthly; It is the duty of Christ, if I may so speak with reverence, to bring men in, John x. And as to him, so to us, he hath manifested so much, by all means possible, to assure men of his willingness to be reconciled to them, if they will be so to him, to assure us he hath engaged himself by all means possible.

And unto all these secret engagements in his own heart, and to his Son,

we may now add, all the professed publications of his mind herein to us, which he hath made upon all occasions, and by all means possible. As,

First; He hath published this news by all three persons. First; himself to Adam in paradise; and renewed it again and again, with his own immediate voice from heaven, 'This is my well beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,' which we heard (says Peter), and is no fable.

Secondly; Christ, who is 'the faithful and true Witness,' Rev. i. He came from the bosom of his Father; and as he died, 'so he preached peace,' Eph. ii. 17; and it was one of the first texts he preached on: Luke iv. 18, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel; to preach deliverance to the captives.'

Thirdly; The Holy Ghost bearing witness. 'God hath exalteth him, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins, Acts v. 31, 32, and so Heb. x. 16. These are the three witnesses in heaven, 1 John v. 7, and their record is this, 'That there is life to be had in his Son:' ver. 11, 'And if we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater;' and he that believes not this makes God a liar, because he believes not the record that God gave of his Son.

And, fourthly; He hath published it also by all creatures reasonable, and to all creatures reasonable.

(First.) The angels, they came and preached 'peace on earth, good will towards men,' Luke ii. 14.

(Secondly.) To men he hath given gifts powerful and full of glory, Eph. iv. 8, &c., and a commission, most large and gracious, to tell men that 'God was in Christ reconciling the world,' 2 Cor. v. 20. Yea,

(Thirdly.) And he hath maintained this ministry in all ages, all times ring with the news of it. The world is as full of these ambassadors now as ever. And these lie as lieger ambassadors, to treat with men about this peace; to proclaim that he is fully willing, and upon that ground to beseech men to be reconciled; and so long as lieger ambassadors lie in a place, and are not sent for away, so long the treaty of peace holds.

(Fourthly.) He hath done this by them in all places; he has bidden them 'go and preach it to all the world, to every creature,' Mark xvi.; and accordingly his disciples did preach it, and had done it in Paul's time, Col. i. 6. And this openly; 'Wisdom cries without, utters her voice in the streets, and cries in the chief places of concourse,' Prov. i. 21. Christ cries his riches at the cross; cares not who hears it, yea, would that all should know it, and he would not have it spoke so openly and generally, if he were not most serious in it: and 'if it were not so, he would have told you.'

(Fifthly.) He hath declared it by all means else that may argue seriousness.

[First.] Not by bare word of mouth, but you have his hand for it; he hath left his mind in writing this book, which is dropped from heaven; the title of it is, 'The word of reconciliation,' 2 Cor. v. 19, the main argument of it being reconciliation; and if there be any truth in it, then certainly in this doctrine of reconciliation. In this book we find proclamation sent forth after proclamation, book after book, line after line; all written to this end, that we might have hope and strong consolation, as the apostle witnesseth.

[Secondly.] He hath added the seals of the sacraments, and an oath to it also; and that was not made or slipped from him at unawares, as oaths from men use to do; but advisedly, with the greatest earnestness and deliberation that might be, Heb. vi. 17. God willing (the text says) more

abundantly to manifest this his intent, and the immutability of this his counsel of reconciling the world to himself through Christ (which is the promise mentioned in the former verses made to Abraham), confirmed that promise with an oath, that by two immutable things (his word and oath), we might have strong consolation and hope.

[Thirdly.] He hath pawned heaven and earth, the covenant of day and night, in mortgage, to forgive iniquity through his Son's death, Jer. xxxi. 34-36, and chap. xxxiii. 20, 'This is my covenant' (says God there), 'that I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sins no more,' ver. 34 and ver. 36: 'If those ordinances depart, of sun and moon,' &c., ver. 35, 'and if you can break the covenant of day and night,' ver. 20th of 33d chap., 'then may this covenant of mine be broken.' Day and night, we see, continue still, and therefore this covenant holds good still.

(Sixthly.) And lastly; If all this will not persuade men of this his willingness to be reconciled to them, and shew them mercy, manifested so seriously so many ways (wherein it is impossible for him to lie, as the apostle speaks), yet at last, let his actions and courses, which he hath taken from the beginning of the world, speak for all the rest. He hath been reconciling the world in that sense: that is, he hath been bringing friends and pardoning many, in all ages, from the beginning of the world. As first, Adam and Eve, the ringleaders, the heads of the rebellion, who drew all the rest of the world into that enmity, were yet reconciled. Kings usually hang up the heads and chiefs in treason, for examples of their justice, though they pardon others; yet them did God reconcile to himself, as examples of his mercy to all that should come of them. And it is observable, that the first thing he did, after the world was fallen, was preaching this gospel, and shewing of mercy in pardoning them. He began to do that soon; he meant to be always doing that to the end of the world, which he delighted in. His heart appears to be most in this work, when he began it so soon. What should I reckon up the rest that followed that? Abraham, David, &c., the time would fail me. The Romans were enemies, and they were reconciled, Rom. v. 8, 10; the Ephesians, Eph. ii. 12, 14; the Colossians were 'sometimes enemies, yet now reconciled,' Col. i. 21; yea (and God be blessed), Christ is yet, according to his own promise, that he would be with us to the end of the world, reconciling the world to himself still. God hath some true friends now in the world, that are truly reconciled to him, that walk in the streets by you, live amongst you; and he will have thousands when you are gone. And what are these but as flags and patterns of mercy and reconciliation, hanged out by God to toll others in? Eph. ii. 7.

And yet, because notwithstanding all this assurance of God's willingness to be reconciled, there are certain tacit objections and stumbling-blocks which lie in poor distressed souls' minds, which block up their access to God for this peace, I will therefore remove some discouragements, which are apt to arise in men's minds when they hear this news of peace and good will. For as when God would speak peace to his people, Isa. lvii., and brings them into the land of Canaan again, he bids them (ver. 14), 'Cast up, and take away the stumbling-blocks;' so when we would persuade men to come unto God, we must make the way clear, and shew how there is an abundant entrance made into the kingdom of Christ.

First, the consciousness of their own rebellions strike such terror into their consciences, as they dare not come into his presence, nor look him in the face; but for that consider what we have been speaking of this while.

Is it not a matter of reconciliation? Now, if there were not sin nor rebellion in thee, there needed not a reconciling: Christ might have been spared this labour. Nay, consider that if this were any real hindrance, there should be no saints in heaven but Christ and his holy angels; for all those saints, who now behold his face with joy, were sometimes enemies as well as thou. For when the text says, He reconcileth all things in heaven, it implies that all those saints who are now in heaven were enemies and rebels once; for else what needed any reconciliation?

But some will further say, Ay; but I have been a deadly, desperate, hateful enemy, and opposer to himself, his children. Why, consider, that these Colossians were enemies in their minds, in evil works, as deeply and as strongly contrary as any others.

Ay; but I have been a transcendent enemy, an arch rebel; and though he may be reconciled to others, yet never, I fear, to me. Well, suppose thy heart and thy life have been never so full of enmity and rebellion against him, yet consider the text tells us, that 'Christ hath all fulness in him to reconcile;' and till thou canst be fuller of sin than he of righteousness, there is enough to pardon thee: 'He is able to save to the utmost,' be the case never so bad, the matter never so foul.

Ay, but thou wilt say, I have been so for these many years, I have lived in enmity, and in that state long, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years; and it is an old grudge God may have against me. Consider that this fulness dwells in Christ; it hath resided longer in him, and in God's acceptance, than sin hath done in thee; yea, it will dwell in him for ever, it is an everlasting righteousness.

In a word, suppose thy sins are never so many and so grievous, yet consider that his thoughts of pardoning are more, for they have been from everlasting, as I shewed out of the 40th Psalm, 5th verse, 'They cannot be numbered.' And also that the plot of this business is to make grace and mercy abound; it is Christ's trade to purge sin, Mal. iii., and the more sin the more work you bring him. He is a physician, who healeth freely and simply, to shew his skill and pity, and for no other end; and therefore the older the worser, the more festered the sore is, he is the willing to heal it; for he shall have his end in healing it more, shew the more skill, the more mercy; therefore, though it may seem to discourage thee, yet it doth not discourage him; when thou comest to him, thou art the welcomer if thou wilt but come to him. It was his business he came for, to save sinners; and suppose thou beest the chief, as Paul was, 1 Tim. i. 15, and a blasphemer, as he, ver. 13, yet is it 'a faithful saying, that Christ came to save sinners,' &c., 'even the chiefest of them.'

But you will say, That was extraordinary, and no way exemplary for me. But the words shew the contrary; for he says it was a truth worthy of all acceptance, as therefore concerning others as well as himself, let them be as great sinners as he: 'And to me first' (says he, ver. 16), 'that I might be a pattern' (of mercy) 'to all that should believe.' Yea, to all that should be afraid and discouraged to believe, by the greatness of their sins; and in that God began with him, he meaneth not to end with him, he puts him in the forefront of the bill, 'to me first,' to bring others the faster in. Some one in heaven must be the chiefest of sinners, and who can tell but that it may be thee?

But when these objections are answered, and sins proved to be no bar between pardon and them, yet then they plead that it may be that they are not elected, as Paul and others were, for whom God intended all this,

and therefore it may prove an uncertain suit ; for if they be not elect ones also, they shall miss of it, though they should seek and seek never so earnestly. If I knew certainly indeed that peace were to be had for me (my person) in particular, there was some life to stir in it.

For answer to this. Not to meddle with the controversy of the universality of Christ's death and God's love, in this place and at this time. But let all this be granted.

First, Let me deal with you upon that supposition, that it might prove uncertain in regard of particular election ; and convince you what strong incentives there are for you to seek it, all this supposed.

I. Unless thou didst certainly know that thou shouldst certainly miss of it, and until God declares thou art none of the number, so long there is hope concerning this thing ; there is an *It may be*, which is as much as we find many promises expressed in, as Zeph. ii. 3 ; so Joel ii., he exhorts them to turn to him with their whole heart, for he is gracious, &c. 'And who knoweth if he will turn and repent, and leave a blessing behind him ?' If it be no more, God expects you should turn upon this ; this hope may quicken you, and stir you to cast yourselves upon his free grace, seeing it is in him ; to refer yourselves to his mercy, depending upon him in the use of all means. 'Let us turn' (say the poor Ninevites, who therefore will rise up in judgment against thee), 'for who can tell but the Lord may repent of the evil ?' And God did so, Jonah iii. 9, 10. There might be a door of escaping—and they were thought prisoners, yet of hope, Zech. ix. 12—and venture they would for a pardon, though they did not know certainly that they should obtain it. But,

II. Suppose yet further, more unlikely than likely that thou shouldst speed in thy suit ; yet considering it is a case of absolute necessity to seek out for reconciliation and peace, there is a strong ground to move thee to seek out for it, and spend the utmost of thy endeavours to attain, and think it an infinite mercy that it is not declared to be absolutely impossible for thee.

In case of absolute necessity, we see men weigh not impossibilities ; but do put themselves and all their endeavours upon a venture, though the business be very uncertain.

For example, men being pressed to the wars, though it be usually certain that some shall die, and those in all probability who fight in the forefront, or venture upon some desperate piece of service, yet it being necessary for them to undertake that service which is commanded upon pain of life, and there being some possibility they may escape, it may fall out so ; in this case they are content to hazard and venture themselves ; therefore also why not much more in this case shouldst not thou, though there were more unlikelihood that thou shouldst not obtain, than that thou shouldst ? To give another also, 2 Kings vii. 3, 4. Two* lepers, they reasoned with themselves, 'If we enter into the city, then the famine being in the city, we shall die there ; if we sit here, we die also. Come, let us fall into the camp of the Aramites : if they save our lives, we shall live ; and if they kill us, we are but dead.' Thus, in a case of necessity, they chose that part which, though it had many improbabilities in it, yet which might fall out otherwise, there was an *if* might be made of saving their lives ; and yet the most unlikely one, for they did not know but that the Aramites might be resolved to cut off all the Jews, and spare not a man alive ; and if they meant to spare any, yet of all others (they might well think) they would cut off them ; because,

* Four.—ED.

being lepers, they were unfit for service and employment, and might infect the camp.

And suppose this were thy case, that of all others thou wert most likely not to obtain mercy, that thou a persecutor and contemner of grace, &c., shouldst in all probability be cut off, yet there being some possibility, in a case of such necessity, come in and venture thyself. And the necessity is greater in thee; for the lepers there might be supposed some miraculous way of preserving them, but for thee no other at all; God hath no other. And the death the leper should die, both one way and the other, would be alike; but if thou seekest not, thou wilt die a worse death. But,

III. In this case of reconciliation, there is (supposing the doctrine of particular election) both a certainty that God intends it for many, and as equal and indifferent a likelihood in view that it is intended for thee as for any other. Which, besides that great necessity to enforce thee, may add much encouragement and hope to thee. For thou heardest before, that none of thy sins are any bar at all; and if any sin must hinder, no sin but that against the Holy Ghost. Though there be many signs of election, yet none of absolute reprobation but it. No former dealings of God with thee, nor any dealing of thine with him, though never so base and injurious; no circumstance in any sin, either that it hath been so often and so long lain in, and committed after such vows, mercies, convictions, deliberations, can exclude thee. Nay, none of these do argue thee further off from mercy than another that is in the state of nature with thee, there is nothing can be said concerning thee but it might have been said of some whose portion reconciliation hath been; as the apostle saith, 'No temptation hath befallen you but what is common to men;' so nothing can be objected against thee but hath been and is common to those who have obtained mercy. No leprosy makes thee unfitter or unlikelier to be saved than another. So that lay but these two together.

1. That it is certain some in all ages shall find mercy, and that thou art as fairly capable and as nigh as another.

2. There is no qualification in the statute to exclude thee: thy country, sex, age, parts, hinders nothing; for God did look to none of all these when he chose men; Acts x. 34, 'He is no respecter of persons;' so as thou mayest say as they, Acts xv. 11, 'I believe that, through the grace of Christ, I may be saved, as well as they;' for grace is free, and respects nothing in the person, one way or other, to whom it intendeth favour.

And therefore I, seeing nothing against it, as well as nothing why I should, I am as near it as another, and therefore will stand for it. 1 Kings xx. 31; when they, having heard the kings of Israel were merciful kings, and had spared others in the like case that they and their master Benhadad were in, and saw nothing in their condition had not been pardoned to others by them, they, upon this ground, say, 'Let us put ropes about our necks, peradventure he may save thy life.' It was but a peradventure, and a greater one than can be supposed in thy case; for they had heard only in the general, 'the kings of Israel,' but whether this king Ahab were of such a disposition they knew not, and yet they adventured upon it to seek him. But thou heardest that this great God is a God gracious, merciful, &c., and that he hath pardoned thousands in the like condition.

IV. In the fourth place, thou art not only thus equally capable of it, as well as another, but there is a probability, a likelihood God doth intend thee, because thou hast heard that he is a merciful God, and willing to be reconciling by his own appointment.

The news of it is especially directed to thee by himself; and he hath bidden thee to stand for it, and come in for it. For the word of reconciliation which we preach is made known but to a few; and those to whom it comes, it comes out of special mercy, and by God's direction, rather to one place than another, rather to one man than to another; as why was Paul forbidden to go into Bythia? Acts xvi. 7, and called to go into Macedonia? and bidden (Acts xviii. 10) to stay at Corinth and preach? but because, as it is there, 'I have much people in this city.' When the plague comes to a place any man lives in, whenas other places are free, he fears lest God may intend to take him away by it, rather than others in other places, and still looks on himself in bed, if he hath no token on him. So when the gospel comes to the place thou livest in, and not the sound of it confusedly, but the knowledge distinctly of it to thy ears, thou hast cause to think it exceeding probable that God doth intend thee for salvation, and the kingdom of God is come nigh thee. It is a great probability of election that the gospel comes to thee, 1 Thess. i. 5, and an especial sign he means to save, and hath chosen those to whom he makes known this mystery of his will, of reconciling and gathering men to himself, Eph. i. 9, &c. Those servants of Benhadad had no intimation of mercy from Ahab himself, or by his direction; but thou hast from God. The mystery hid from all ages, and now from most of the world, is revealed unto thee, and he hath directed us to thee in an especial providence. He hath not proclaimed this pardon to all prisons, but to a few; and therefore, thou being in those prisons to which these proclamations of mercy are sent, hast cause to seek out for it, and much encouragement also to do it. Especially,

V. Fifthly, this gospel, offering great salvation as annexed to this peace and reconciliation made with God; the lepers thought only to save their lives, and so did Ben-hadad; he was out of hopes haply of having his kingdom again; this, added to that indifferent capableness of thy attaining it, and the probability annexed to that, should exceedingly quicken thee to seek out for it; for in case of preferment, as when a great office is void, a living or fellowship, which will certainly be bestowed on some, when a man shall hear of such a thing, and have a hint of it from the party that bestows it, and be told by him that he is as fair for it as any other, and as capable, that there is no clause in the statute to exclude him and shut him out, and that he hath as good means to make for it as any other; how would and doth this use to quicken men to use their utmost endeavour, to lay out their money, and put in for it? when yet they know there are many suitors, and that the place can be bestowed but upon one.

Now this is the case in hand; the gospel offering great salvation; 'so great,' as he can no otherwise express it; Heb. ii. 3, 'But how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?' And this thou art as fair for, canst make as good means, if thou comest to Jesus Christ, as any other. This the apostle intimates, 1 Cor. ix. 24, speaking of his endeavour to be partaker of the gospel, and the salvation in it: 'Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, though but one receive the prize?' yet all will venture, and therefore why not thou? Will not this practice of men, in case of a corruptible crown, as he calls it, though there be an uncertainty in it, condemn our neglect of seeking an incorruptible crown, as ver. 25, and stop our mouths for pleading, that few can attain, and some may miss it?

VI. Sixthly, consider God's manner of revealing and making known this reconciliation to be had (suppose but by a few); yet it is indifferently to be propounded to all, as expecting that all should be stirred up at the hearsay

of it, with the hopes of it, and endeavours after it, Luke x. 5. Christ bade them say to every house they came at, 'Peace be to this house;' and God looks that every one to whom this news should come should look out for peace, as a thing belonging to him, Luke xix. 42; yea, commands all to whom it comes to stand for it, and to use all means to attain it, 1 John iii. 23, and Acts xvii. 30, and will condemn men if they neglect to do so, Heb. ii. 3; and not only so, but beseecheth you to be reconciled, to come and seek it at his hands. And if one that had a great preferment in his gift should do so, would it not mightily encourage you with hopes to attain it, if he should send to thee to stand for it?

VII. But yet further, in the seventh place, if this news which thou hast heard, of willingness in God to be reconciled, &c, thou either art affected and moved to come in, or not affected; one of these must fall out. If not affected at all to listen after it, thou hast no cause to complain thou shalt not obtain it; for can any complain he cannot attain that which he hath no heart to, nor mind to attain? But if thou beest affected with it, and hast a heart desirous to obtain it; if thy heart be set on work to seek out for it; if he hath enamoured thy heart with his Son, and given thee a high esteem of reconciliation with him, and given thee a restless spirit after it, this is a strong presumption, more than a probability, that it is intended for thee, that thou art a son of peace, Luke x. 6. 'For if it be hid, it is hid to them who are lost,' 2 Cor. iv. 3.

VIII. In the eighth place, if thou wilt seek it, and dost continue to seek it, there is a certainty that thou shalt obtain it; and it is a false connection to say, that there being few elected, therefore it may prove uncertain though I seek it.

Now, that there is a certainty annexed to seeking, is plain by what Paul says, 1 Cor. ix. 26, 'I therefore so run, not as uncertainly;' that is, I so run, that I shall be sure to speed. He had said in the 24th verse (as I shewed before), that as in the Olympian games many run, yet but one receives and wins the crown, and yet many will run though it be so uncertain; but, saith he, in endeavouring after salvation in the gospel, of which he there speaks, if you will but endeavour to run as you ought, with your utmost might, you shall be sure to attain, as many as will take pains to do so, and use all means, as he speaks there; some, indeed, fall short through lazy running; but, says he, 'So run that ye may attain;' that is, there is a running and a seeking which will certainly obtain; I therefore so run, and so running shall obtain; not as uncertainly, but so as I shall be sure to win the prize. And so Christ also hath said, 'Seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you;' and he backs this by a strong convincing demonstration to assure us of it, Luke xi. 5, If one comes to a friend at midnight, and desires some necessary thing of him, though he be one who hath no list to rise, ver. 7, nor regarded the relation of friendship at all in it, ver. 8, but says he has all his children already in bed with him, ver. 7, yet for his importunities' sake, he would rise in the end. Then I say unto you, says Christ, 'Knock, and it shall be opened;' though the door seems shut against thee, though thou shouldst think God intended not friendship to thee, and had (as it were) all his friends about him already, yet he would hear in the end; and ver. 10, he confirms it by experience, that there was never yet any turned away, 'But every one that asketh, receiveth; and that seeketh, findeth.' There was never any yet that did so and was turned away empty.

And indeed, if you use the means, and seek constantly, who should hinder

you? Or how is it possible that you should come to miss of it? Neither God the Father, nor God the Son, who yet are the parties through whose hands reconciliation runs.

1. Not God the Father; for he having committed the word of reconciliation to us, to make it known to every man indifferently, with command from him, yea, with earnest beseeching to persuade men to be reconciled to him, 2 Cor. v. 20. If any soul upon this news comes, and hath a mind to prove, is taken with his friendship, can never be quiet without it, and useth all means to attain it, God is as truly bound to dispense peace to that soul as if he had named him from heaven; for we do all this 'in God's stead,' as 2 Cor. v. 20, and as ambassadors do in his stead beseech you; and herein we are lawful ambassadors; so as it is, as if God by us did beseech you, and we exceeding not our commission; God will make it good, as kings use to do the treaties of their ambassadors in the like, when they do things in their names and according to their instructions. God the Father's warrant we have to go to his Son, and he condemns us if we do not.

And, 2. Jesus Christ will not be your hindrance; for he hath said, John vi. 37, 'Whosoever cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.' And we have reason to think him willing; for it was the end of his death, that he might see his seed and be satisfied. Christ needed not have purchased it for himself, who was and is 'God blessed for ever;' and therefore is not desirous to keep it to himself; it is no profit to him to have it lie by him: he had rather it should be put out, and that others should share in it. And who should? The good angels have no need of it, and the bad ones are incapable; therefore for us poor sons of men it is ordained, called therefore man's righteousness.

And, besides, he was God's servant (as was said) in that great work. When, therefore, I come to him with his father's warrant and command (which you heard you have), it is as if you should come to the lord treasurer with a ticket from the king for so much money; he must dispense it, for it is the king's money, as this *God's righteousness*, and so called; and he is but the king's servant, as Christ also was. And it is also his office; for why else was he appointed priest? (as she said, Why art thou a king, if thou wilt not do me justice?) for Heb. v. iii., If one brought a sacrifice to the priest, he was bound to offer it by the law, otherwise he failed in his office; and so is Christ to present thee to his Father, if thou comest to him: John x. he says, His sheep he must bring; he looks at it as his duty.

Only this he will say to thee, that as his Father hath appointed him a priest, and he is but a servant in this dispensation of righteousness, yet his Father hath appointed him a king, a head, a husband to thee, to submit to; and that he will require of thee, or thou shalt have no benefit by his death; as thou hast a patent for righteousness, he hath a charter for sovereignty over thee, and obedience from thee; which is the second thing you are to be convinced of.