

to be pressing on towards him! What a pitch of mortification to the world have some win to by the faith of this, 'that he is unchangeable?' All these vanishing things are made quickly to flee away. David saith, in Psalm xxxix. 6. 'Men walketh in a vain show, they are disquieted in vain.' That which makes him attain to such a length, is the divine apprehension of the unchangeableness of God, in the seventh verse of that Psalm, 'And now Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee: there he solaces himself in God, after he had taken a look of the vanity of all things beside him.

The *sixth* advantage that we have by the consideration of God's unchangeableness, is this, much joy and satisfaction: as is clear, Heb. vi. 18. where the immutability of the counsel of God is brought in, to make the heirs of God to have strong consolation. We are exceeding short of our task, when we are out of the exercise of this attribute of God. O but believers might be without the reach of these things that trouble them, by the meditation of his unchangeableness! When we might be going up to the top of mount Pisgah, and beholding the promised land, and to get our hope and satisfaction of these things more in fruition; no doubt, our misbelief of this makes us walk much in heaviness. The most part of Christians' time is spent in seeking the proof of their interest: I do not condemn their work; but it were a compendious way to study himself, whether for shunning of sin and offences, or walking near unto him. This is a part of conformity to God, to be exercising holiness; and for restraining of sins, to be in the consideration of his justice and omnipotency. We confess this is a depth, but it is such a depth as a Lamb may wade. Here is matter for search and admiration.

Now, to this unchangeable God be everlasting praise, world without end. Amen.

SERMON X.

2 Cor. xii. 7. *Lest I should be exalted above measure, &c.*

WERE it not a pleasant and glorious sight to behold one in the form and likeness of the Son of God walking in the midst of his solemn assemblies? Were it not a pleasant sight to behold the stately and majestic steps of princely Jesus in his sanctuary? But, O! it is a sad dispensation, to preach of an unknown Christ, and to hear of an unknown Christ? And is it not a sad dispensation, when at a communion we feast with a veiled Christ that does not hearken to the voice of our cry? Is it not a sad dispensation to walk with an absent Christ? And is it not much more sad for Christians, to take up Christ as at a distance from

them? I think, if the Christians of these days would take a sight of their own hearts, they would see these four things engraven upon them in great letters.

First, They may see much distance from God, and want of an ancient fellowship and abundance of revelation that the saints have had before.

Secondly, A Christian may see little desire engraven on his heart, after the abundance of these revelations, and choice enjoyments that have been communicated to the saints.

Thirdly, A Christian may see little sorrow, notwithstanding of the want of these enjoyments that have been of old communicated to the saints.

Lastly, We may see this engraven on our hearts, our being much affected with the things of a present world, when Christ is away. Are there not idols in our bosom that take up his room? And may not that be a lamentation on the mountains, and high places of Israel? 'O return, return, thou whom our souls love.'

At the last occasion that we spake on these words, we told you there were six things in them.

First, That there are some times when Christ communicates to the souls of his own, eminent, excellent and extraordinary enjoyments of himself; as is clearly presupposed in that word, 'Lest I should be exalted above measure, through the abundance of the revelations,' &c. Of this we have spoken to on several occasions.

The *second* thing in the words, of which we are now to speak, is, that the most choice and excellent estate of communion and fellowship with God, that the saints have had below, they are ready to abuse them, and in hazard to spoil them. This is clear, Paul was ready to be 'exalted above measure.' Pride, as it were, was beginning to spring off this noble and excellent root, enjoyment of God. I shall not stand to clear this to you: is it not clear from the practice of Adam, that though he was under most eminent discoveries of God, yet how much did he abuse them in that estate and condition? And is it not clear in Jacob? Gen. xxxii. 29. He fell into the sin of curiosity, when he was under eminent enjoyments of God. Was it not clear in the practice of the bride? Song iii. 3, 4. She fell into the sin of security, when she was under eminent enjoyments of Christ. Was it not clear in the practice of John? Rev. xxii. 8. He fell into the sin of idolatry under eminent enjoyments of Christ. All which do speak this, that a Christian may abuse his most near and excellent enjoyments that he meets with here. And I would only say this by the way, that the desperate evil of pride is one of these things that doreadily steal a Christian's enjoyments. And, by the way, we would have you to notice this, there are some

things in a Christian that he is most ordinarily proud of: *First*, A Christian may be proud of his gifts. *Secondly*, A Christian may be proud of his graces. *Thirdly*, A Christian may be proud of his enjoyments. *Fourthly*, A Christian may be proud of his obedience.

First, He is proud of his gifts, when he has more of the knowledge of Christ than others; he sits down and boasts, and begins to be presumptuous of his borrowed feathers. I would only say this to a Christian that is proud of his gifts, beware lest God take that from thee which thou seemest to have. And I would say this to a Christian that is proud of his gifts, which Joab said to David, 'Let the Lord increase thy gifts, how many soever they be, a thousand fold.' Yet there is no reason to be proud of them.

Secondly, A Christian may be proud of his grace; and that which is more strange, a Christian may be proud of his humility; even that excellent grace, he may have the foundation of pride, that he is humble. Therefore it is much for a Christian to be mortified to his mortification; it is much for a Christian to be denied to his self-denial; to be humble, in his being humble; to be nothing, in his being nothing. I would only say this to a Christian that is proud of his grace, it is impossible for grace to grow, as long as thou art proud; and it is impossible for the grace of others to grow beside thee, as long as thou art proud. I may say that to thee, which the young man said to the prophet, 'Alas, alas! Master, it is borrowed,' your grace is but the gift of Christ.

Thirdly, A Christian may be proud of his enjoyments; as Paul was in hazard 'to be exalted above measure, through the abundance of the revelations,' &c. A Christian does oftentimes ascend in his thoughts, when Christ lifts him up. O! but it is much to sit near the ground, when Christ sets us up above.

Fourthly, A Christian may be proud of his obedience, when he goes about the exercise of any duty that is singular, when he has offered to suffer for Christ, to do some eminent service for Christ, he is then proud.

Now in speaking to this truth, that the most eminent enjoyments of a Christian may be abused, I would speak to these things?

First, To some considerations concerning this. And,

First, Consider the devil never assaults a Christian more violently, than immediately after his enjoyments; 'The blast of the terrible one is then as a storm against the wall,' when a Christian is under eminent enjoyments. We suppose this is clear from these words, when Paul was brought nearest Christ, 'then Satan was at his right hand, ready to oppose him.' There is,

A *second* consideration, and it is this, that oftentimes the devil never gets such eminent victories over Christians, as after their enjoyments; I mean of some Christians, after their emi-

ment enjoyments: we suppose this is clear in the experience of the saints. I shall only give you these three grounds, why the devil's most eminent victories are immediately after enjoyments.

First, A Christian is then most imprudent and presumptuous; oftentimes therefore it is, that the not walking within the blessed lines of dependence, and divine subordination to Christ, the devil gets advantage over him. Sometimes a Christian, after his enjoyments, walketh in his own strength, or, at the best, in the strength of his enjoyments.

A *second* ground why the devil's most eminent victories are immediately after enjoyments, is this, because when a Christian is not much in the exercise of watchfulness. Oftentimes when a Christian is admitted to the banqueting-house of Christ, and his banner of love is over him, then he falls asleep in the bed of love; then it is that a Christian says to his soul, 'take thee rest, for thou hast much goods laid up for many years.'

A *third* ground why the devil's most eminent victories are immediately after enjoyments, is this, then ordinarily a Christian loses the grace of fear. After we are begun to be brought near the king, we should beware of singing the triumph before the victory. When we are brought within sight of Christ, then we cry out, 'My mountain standeth strong, I shall never be moved.' Therefore I would say this to you, watch, watch, watch, after enjoyments, 'for he is at hand that is ready to betray you.'

The *third* consideration is, consider the temptations of the devil, and these assaults that he trists immediately after enjoyments, that they be resisted and withstood. There are eminent advantages attending such a frame, if there be a messenger of Satan given to buffet you after enjoyments, then resist. I may say, there is more advantage to resist a temptation after enjoyments, than there is by resisting three after desertion. It is then that a Christian kills his ten thousands; but at other times he kills but his thousands. I shall give you this advantage that a Christian gets by resisting temptations after enjoyments. *First*, It brings forth much humility. It is known it has a broad sight of these two. 1. A broad sight of Christ. And, 2. a broad sight of ourselves; it will make us to lie low in the dust: as is clear in the practice of Paul; in the former verses, he doth vent much of his enjoyments; but giving way to the devil's assaults, then it is their stirring up or awaking Christ ere he please. I suppose, these enjoyments of Christ that are attended with much spiritual fightings, are the longest, the sweetest, and the most advantageous. The *third* advantage is this, such a Christian doth maintain the faith of these two. 1. Of his interest in Christ. 2. And of the reality of his enjoyments. Believe it, it is hard for a

Christian to give way to the temptation immediately after enjoyments, and not be constrained to call in question their interest, or, at least, the reality of their enjoyments, if ye would keep the faith of these two lively upon your spirits, study to resist the devil, when he buffets you at such a time. The *fourth* advantage that attends a Christian immediately after enjoyments by resisting temptations, is this, it puts a Christian much to the exercise of prayer. This is clear in comparing the words of the text with the following verse; 'for this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.' And is not this a noble advantage, to have a divine liberty in going about that noble and excellent duty, prayer? And, by the way, the prayers that a Christian hath, to resist temptations immediately after enjoyments, they receive a speedy return; so Paul received speedily that return, 2 Cor. ix. 'My grace is sufficient for thee.' The *fifth* advantage is this, it is a notable way for a Christian to come to the right improving of his enjoyments. It stands in, 1. The strengthening our experiences. As it were, there should not be an enjoyment of God, nor visit of Christ, but it should be put in among the records of our experiences. 2. Our enjoyments should strengthen our experiences. As it were, there should not be a sight gotten but we should take Christ in our arms, and cry out, 'He is mine, he is mine.' 3. Our enjoyments should be improved for the strengthening of our love. There is not a sight of Christ, but it should strengthen that noble grace of love; that when we see Christ, we may be constrained to love, and to cry out, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us?' 4. Our enjoyments should be improved for strengthening in duty, and our hatred of sin. These are the excellent improvements of enjoyments. And, I say, if a Christian would win to this, he should study to resist temptations on the back of enjoyments.

The *fourth* consideration is, that the most eminent victories that a Christian meets with, is at a time when he resists temptations immediately after enjoyments. *First*, Because then a Christian hath much strength. I shall only give you these three grounds why the most eminent victories of a Christian are by resisting of temptations after enjoyments. *First*, Because then a Christian hath much strength communicated unto him for wrestling with temptation: as it were, there is not an enjoyment of a Christian, but it hath strength to the full to fight with the special enemies. A *second* ground is, because the captain of the field is present, he is standing at our right hand. These do exceedingly help to have eminent victories over the devil. A *third* ground is, a Christian, in the time of his enjoyments, has low and undervaluing account and esteem of all things beside Christ. Sometimes there

are, wherein a Christian cannot strike at his idols with force; there is, as it were, a piece of his heart that withdraws his strength, and it is certain, that sometimes a piece of the heart of a Christian will cry out, mortify such a lust; and another piece of the heart will cry out, O mortify not such a lust. *Secondly*, We would propose these seven faults that a Christian falls in after his enjoyments.

The *first* fault that a Christian falls in after his enjoyments, is pride; and this is clear from the words of the text, and from Psalm xxx. 6. I would only say this by the way, and take notice of it, it is more easy for a Christian to be denied to his graces, than to be denied to his enjoyments. The graces of a Christian are not so much the foundation of his pride, as his enjoyments. This is clear from Gal. ii. 20. compared with the words of the text, where Paul is denied to his grace, but he is in hazard of being proud of his enjoyments.

The *second* fault that a Christian falls in after his enjoyments is, curiosity to propose questions to God, that he should not propose; so Jacob, when he was in communion with God, fell in this curious question, tell me thy name? And so also Manoah, and he received this answer, 'Why askest thou after my name, seeing it is secret?' Or as the words may be rendered, 'seeing it is wonderful.' I suppose 'too much familiarity of a Christian with God, corrupt good manners:' they then begin to ask a ground of his doing: they then study to take up the incomprehensible essence of God. And I would say this, a Christian sometimes in his enjoyments, falls into the sin of idolatry; it is not so when ye are nearest God, ye study to bring down God in some visible shape or idea, that so that visible shape of God may provoke fear? And this is damnable idolatry, transforming the invisible God into the image of a visible thing.

The *third* fault is, a Christian's slighting of his enjoyments, when he has abundance of the precious revelations, he begins to slight and undervalue these excellent things. I would only say these two things to you; *First*, That a Christian may long much, and pursue earnestly after the enjoyments of God, and yet when he has them, may undervalue them: he may have an high esteem of an absent Christ, and a low esteem of a present Christ, see Song iv. ult. compared with chap. v. 3. In the first place, she longs much after the enjoyment of Christ, and communion with him; and yet when it is attained, she does much slight it. *Secondly*, A Christian may long much after communion with God at one time, and refuse it at another time. This is clear by comparing Song iii. ult. with Song v. 3. there she is much in longing after the breathings of the Spirit: yet in chap. v. 3.

she undervalues his condescending to visit her. I suppose it is known, it is the great fault of a Christian to undervalue communion when he has it.

There is this *fourth* fault, our being more in undervaluing our enjoyments than in having a high account of the Lord that gave the enjoyments; or else this, we are oftentimes more in love with the gift of God, than with him who is the giver; we terminate our love, our faith, upon our joy, our enjoyments, all which should be terminated upon Christ.

The *fifth* fault in a Christian is security; this is clear in Song v. 2. where the bride being under eminent enjoyments of Christ, she fell asleep. It is known, that when Christ does manifest himself, we then put off our coat, and take our rest.

The *sixth* fault that a Christian falls in after his enjoyments, is this, he takes advantage to be more neglectful in duty, because of his enjoyments. Ordinarily a Christian does never more slight watchfulness, nor fear so much as after enjoyments.

The *seventh* fault that a Christian falls in after his enjoyments, is this, a sinful gazing and wondering at our enjoyments. Is it not sometimes known, that a Christian, meeting with eminent enjoyments of God in prayer, he has begun to wonder at what he has attained, and forgotten to pursue after more? they have stood and gazed at what was their present lot and dispensation, but they pursued not after more. I say this, let not a Christian reflect on his enjoyments, till he has done with prayer. For ordinarily a Christian, when he has wondered at his enjoyments, he has brought himself into a dead and lifeless frame.

Now that, *thirdly*, which we would speak unto, is this, that since communion with God, and eminent enjoyments that a Christian has of Christ, may be abused, I would only press these three things to be a Christian's exercise after enjoyments. *First*, O Christians! be much in the exercise of fear: 'let him that stands, take heed lest he fall.' Would ye know when a Christian is nearest a fall, or apostacy? It is when he is farthest from apostacy in his own apprehension. I love not a fearless Christian that shall bear his own weight. *Secondly*, Be as much in studying how to keep Christ when present, as ye have endeavoured to get Christ when absent: therefore, when ye have gotten the presence of Christ, think not your work is done. The greatest work is before your hands, which is this, 'To charge your hearts by the roes and hinds of the field, that they stir not up nor awake your beloved, till he please.' O but it is much to be touched with Christ's presence! Believe it, Christ can dispense with wrongs while absent, that he will not dispense with while present. *Thirdly*, Study to improve your enjoyments to the end for which they

were sent. There is not a visit of Christ, but it has a voice. There are two great voices and words that our enjoyments do speak. *First*, O mortify your predominant idols! *Secondly*, O love precious Christ! In a manner, when a Christian sees Christ, he never desires the seeing of another object. I would ask this question at you. Did ye never meet with a visit from Christ in such a place, that ye did call it, the place of living after seeing? I think, if the life of communion with God were known, we would not be so great strangers to it.

The *third* thing that we proposed to speak to from the words, was this, that the most dark and dreadful dispensation that we meet with, has a glorious end in it. This is clear from the end of giving 'a messenger of Satan to buffet Paul, lest he should be exalted above measure.' The darkest cross and affliction of a Christian has a sweet design of love treasured up in it.

In speaking to this, I would speak a little to these things.

First, There are five dark dispensations, at least terrible like dispensations of Christ to the soul, every one of them shall have a glorious end, and a sweet design of love.

The *first* dark dispensation that a Christian meets with is this, God's permitting the devil, or 'a messenger from Satan to buffet him.' It is sad for a Christian to be under the strong assaults of the devil. Sometimes a Christian is put to that question under his manifold temptations, 'O why am I thus?' Yet his dispensation has a sweet design of love, for the power of love and grace is manifested here.

The *second* dark dispensation that a Christian meets with, is this, to be under desertion and distance when he goes to prayer. Christ draws a vail betwixt his face and them: and when they come to preachings, Christ, as it were, standing behind the curtains, doth not manifest himself: and when they go to communions, they sit down and feast with a veiled Christ; they sit down with one that does not manifest himself to them. Yet, O say I, in this dark dispensation of desertion, where is that design of love? All things work together for the good of them that love precious Christ. I confess a deserted Christian, when desertion and distance is a burden, it is a comfortless life: but believe it, the visits of Christ, after long desertion, is a most refreshful visit, it hath much advantage in it.

The *third* dark dispensation that a Christian meets with, is this, his being put to dispute his interets, and being under a cloud in regard of his hope, he is put to debate, have I a right to heaven? O that this debate were the lot of many, and many were serious in that question: however, there be not a dispute concerning your interest to heaven, nor a questioning of your peace with God.

The *fourth* dark dispensation that Christians meet with, is this, when they are denied the returns of their prayers: they say, it is much to pray to an absent Christ, but it is much more to pray to a silent Christ, that doth not hearken to the voice of our cry. I would only say this of the returns of your prayers, he has a sweet design of love in them. He knows well how to dispense of his abundance, and how to time his gifts.

The *fifth* and last dark dispensation that Christians meet with, is this, that for all the pains that they have taken in mortifying their lusts, they come not speed. This is sad, and an afflicting dispensation, that notwithstanding all the pains they took to mortify their idols, they are as strong on their hands as before. I would only say this to such fight, for the day of your victory is coming. A Christian must die fighting, and not triumphing. I think it is not unsuitable to a Christian's hope, that when he shall be standing before the gates of heaven, to be fighting with his corruptions; it is unsuitable to his hope, that when the one foot is within the gates of the city, and the other without, to have a tear falling from our eyes, as it were, for a Christian to give up the ghost with this, 'O wretched man that I am!'

That which, *secondly*, I shall speak to, shall be to some considerations concerning this.

1. It is more easy for a Christian to behold infinite wisdom in their stroke, than infinite love in the darkest dispensations that Christ dispenses to his own. They may behold infinite wisdom in it, when they cannot behold infinite love in it. I would only say this by the way, a Christian should study these three things in his darkest dispensations. *1st*, Infinite wisdom in his crosses, to see that God dispenses so with him, and hath dealt wisely in so doing. *2dly*, A Christian should study spotless holiness and righteousness in his dispensations: he may see that God in afflicting is just: as it were, when Christ presents a cross to us, we may write down this to the foot of our crosses, 'Righteous art thou, O Lord, when thou judgest,' &c. *3dly*, A Christian should study to see infinite love in his cross.

2. I would say this to you, that a Christian when he meets with a cross, he may take it in his arms with patience; yet, if the same cross be lengthened out, he may turn impatient; this is clear in the practice of Job.

3. I would say this to you, there may be much disputings of God's way of conveying you to heaven; there may be much fretting and repining at your cross dispensations; but believe it, the day is approaching, when ye shall write this upon the posts of the door of heaven, 'He hath done all things well.' I think, there shall be some part of eternity spent in interrogations and

questions: Christ will question you concerning the things ye met with; O friend! when I sent such a cross, did I not well? And ye shall be constrained to answer, yes. And, O friend, when I deserted you at such a time, did I not well? Then ye shall answer, yes, O precious Christ! thou hast done all things well.

4. I would say this to you, it is impossible for a Christian to have the same thoughts of his crosses now when he is under them, that he shall have at the day of death: then a Christian shall be constrained to cry out, and say, Blessed be the Lord that ever I met with such a cross. I shall only desire you to get your peace made with God, that all things ye meet with may be blessed unto you, knowing this of a surety, there is not one grain weight of affliction in the cup, O Christian! that infinite wisdom did not contrive to be there, and infinite love did not put there, and so is it not a cup that must be drunken, since the precious fingers of Christ have mingled it? Therefore let not thy heart say when thou meets with a cross, 'O let this cup pass from me!' There is more love in a cross, than oftentimes we do imagine; where are the sweet actings of love? Where are the sweet soul embracings betwixt Christ and the soul 'when they are admitted to behold the sun in his strength, and to behold him whose cheeks are as beds of spices, set about with flowers?' A Christian's midnight without, may be his noon-day within; there may be a sweet day within, when there is not much light without. O that we were content to go to heaven in a fiery chariot, that there may not be a dispensation that Christ carves out to us, but we may take it in our arms and welcome it. O prisoners of hope, and expectants of heaven, and heirs of the grace of life! comfort yourselves with this, that ere long the song shall be heard in heaven, speaking comfortably to Jerusalem and to her mourners. Behold, O Christians! Christ is standing at the end of your race with a crown in his hand, crying out, 'to him that overcometh will I give the crown of life.' O what a day shall it be, when the blessed hand of Jesus Christ shall put a crown upon our heads? and will we not be constrained to take off the crown which he hath put on, and cast it at his feet, according to that practice, Rev. iv. at the close? As it were, they thought shame to wear a crown in his sight, as is imported in these words, 'Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power,' &c.' Will ye think on this precious day, when our darkness and night shall be turned to the morning, that shall admit of no following night. I might say, O what wonderful actings of love? What wonderful actings of joy? What wonderful actings of knowledge will be in that day? I would only press this upon you, will ye but take this before your hearts, and, as it were, think upon it, and act their

blesSEDness that are in heaven? What would you think to have Christ eternally in your arms? Would you have a description of heaven? It is Christ sitting in the midst, and all the eyes of these many precious thousands are fixed on him, and his eyes fixed on them. In short, it stands in these four.

First, Christ is looking to the saints, and their eyes are looking on him.

Secondly, The saints are eternally loving Christ, and Christ is eternally loving them.

Thirdly, They are eternally wondering at him, and he is eternally wondering at them; he is to be admired of all his saints, and glorified of all them that believe.

Fourthly, The saints are embracing Christ, and he is embracing them. O these soul-ravishing embraces of Christ in the arms of them that are begotten again unto a lively hope, there is no separation between Christ and them! I would wish that the desire of the Greeks, John xii. 21. were the desire of all that are here. 'We desire to see Jesus.' O if you had but one desire? to behold and get a sight of him, ye would get him for a desire? Shall ever these cursed eyes 'behold the Sun of righteousness, the noble Plant of renown?' O blessed are these that see him? Blessed are these that have their hope and expectation of seeing him? O blessed are these that are walking in their way? I shall say no more but this, a Christian, while he is here, he is both out of Christ, and in Christ, and going to Christ.

He is in Christ, in respect of faith; out of Christ, in respect of that endless complete conformity; and going to Christ, in respect of that endless immediate fruition of him; he is going to Christ, to have his eternal delights that are at his right-hand? O run, run, run, till the day that you shall have Christ unfolded to you, by his being in your arms, and shall be contained to cry out, 'Here I will rest, and make my eternal abode.'

Now, to this Christ be eternal praise. Amen.

SERMON XI *.

2 COR. iv. 3. *But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.*

THIS everlasting gospel that is preached unto you, 'is sent for the falling and rising again of many in Israel;' for as the gospel is to some that precious *foundation stone*, so likewise it is to others 'that stumbling-stone, and rock of offence upon whom it falls.' I may say to some that are here, I have the saddest news to tell you that ever ye heard, and that is, 'Jesus Christ

* This Sermon was preached at the Eastwood.