

ing judgment; and when we pray and speak, as having the faith of this; and believe it, all your works shall be put to the touchstone. Now, to this God be everlasting praise. Amen.

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A

## WORD OF PREFACE

BEFORE THE

## S E R M O N.

**I** WOULD say three things to you. *First*, There shall be no confusion in heaven. It shall not need to be questioned, whether they shall come near God or not; for there shall be none there, but they shall enjoy God as much as though there were none there but themselves. And, *secondly*, believe it, I think, we might be content, that this place were our graves, and this written above it, 'Here lies one dead, sick of love for Christ.' *Thirdly*, Believe it, I think, he is obliged eternally to bless God that wins out of the world without a stain, or a spot in his face; yea, there be some of us, that the greatest atheist here may see that word in Isa. xiv. 10. 'Art thou become like unto us?'

O! what know ye, but some that are here may crucify Christ before they go out of the world? Then this shall be written on our graves, 'Have mind of Lot's wife, and of the land of sins.'

O expectants of heaven! What would ye give for a pass to go there? What should move us to stay? Are ye groaning to be home? Where are your hearts? Are they not up in heaven? Where is your hope? Is it not in heaven? Where is your treasures, desires, and love? Are they not up in heaven? Where are your longings and expectations? Are they not in heaven? O blessed is the Christian that can cast up his eyes to heaven, and say, 'Yonder is my inheritance and portion! There shall I never be sequestered from the blessed vision of Christ, God man!' They will cry out, 'How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! The shout of a king is amongst us!' And,

*Lastly*, Perhaps there are some here wearying before we begin. What knowest thou, atheist, but there is as much wearying in heaven about thy service, as thou art about this? O! if Christ would come here, and declare his mind, he would make it a thin congregation, if none should bide but saints, I fear that he should say, that not one of twelve, but eleven of twelve should betray him, and but one of twelve should escape! O how few would our number be! I know hypocrisy may be spun with a

very small thread. There is much counterfeit religion! There is much false faith! There is much false mortification, and repentance, and holiness in these times! Alas! we are but the pictures of holiness.

Now, let us go to him, that can make a sweet correspondence betwixt heaven and earth, &c.

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### SERMON VIII.\*

EXOD. xxxiv. 6. *And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth.*

**I**T would certainly require a divine and excellent spirit, elevated above the ordinary spirit of man, and separated from that impurity and earthliness of mind, which makes us incapable of seeing and beholding that holy Majesty of him, to speak to any purpose on this text. O what a transcending Majesty is God! and by how many degrees is he above the understanding of the angels and intellectual spirits! Therefore it were vanity and great boldness and presumption for man, though he be made a little lower than the angels, not only in glory, but in wisdom, to conceive and think that they could unfold his mysterious name. It were more convenient for us, and it were our wisdom, rather to believe than to speak, and adore than to enquire, and to cast such a sweetness in the eminency, greatness and infinite mysteriousness of these things, that we believe they be always secrets as might ravish our souls more to the love of them, being unknown and secret unto us, than all the perfections of all things here below, being discovered and known to the bottom to us could do. We confess we had need to be taught, what, and how to speak of him. Who can order his speech of this blessed Majesty, by reason of earthliness? What can darkness speak of him who is light? Or how can man, that is finite in his understanding, comprehend or discourse of that infinite Majesty? We may speak below the truth in pointing out his excellency as we always do, for it is impossible for us to go above it. This is a subject too sublime for angels, much more for men to speak of. We speak not with holy admiration and astonishment of so wonderful a Majesty. We conceive much of a man's blessedness to consist in the knowledge of God: though we had the tongue of men and angels, and had all knowledge, and understood all mysteries; yet could we not understand this blessed and adorable mystery, the knowledge of God. What more de-

\* This Sermon was preached in the West Kirk at Edinburgh.

sirable than that? Though we confess, it doth not consist in vain empty speculations of him. All our knowledge of that blessed Majesty, that doth not occasion fear, and love, and admiration, is but vain and empty. We think it were our advantage to be spending our hand-breadth of time in comprehending him, 'who is without beginning of days, and end of life, who was before all, and shall be after all.' How totally is the mortal spirit of man depraved? How completely is that primitive glory defaced! and that native liberty taken away, while he is confined in the study and knowledge of things here below, and is not elevated to the study and contemplation of that uncreated Being, in the searching out of things here below; if that saying be true, 'As long as we breath here, Art is long, but time is short!' We may go a little higher, when we begin to search him, who is without search, and cry out, 'As long as eternity breathes, Art is long, and eternity is short?' The knowledge of God is so holy and mysterious an art, that long and endless eternity shall not suffice to unfold! We must search and know, and begin to know, we must be ignorant, when we have gone to our greatest degree of knowledge!

Now, there are two great mysteries, in the unfolding of which all our time ought to be spent: and these are, God and our own selves: and we should know the goodness of the one, and the badness of the other. We should study the mystery of iniquity, and the unsearchable depth that is within our own bosom, that we may be provoked to study the divine mystery of the mystery of God, of which all this time we are to speak, that the one depth may be swallowed up of the other depth; and likewise of these five qualifications of the mercy and love of God.

*First*, The freedom of his love, holden forth in that word, *gracious*; grace having an holy antipathy and inconsistency with merit, and doth shame all price and deserving.

The *second* qualification is, that it is not easily provoked, but doth suffer long: holden forth in that word, *long-suffering*; which doth conclude in its bosom that noble and encouraging property of his love, of which that word, Eph. iii. 17. 'He rests in his love,' is a commentary; or as the word is in the original, 'He is deaf to all the challenges that Satan, or our own hearts, can object.' Love in him, which is not easily provoked, doth, as it were, close his ears.

The *third* property of it, which is included in this, The unspeakableness of his love, which is that noble and encouraging property that doth cut off all jealousy, and likewise base suspicion. This property is clearly included in the former, he is not easily provoked, but suffers long. We can give no other answer



for it, but because he is 'the unchangeable Being, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.'

The *fourth* property of his love is, the infiniteness and greatness of it, holden forth in that word, abundant in goodness.

There is a *fifth* property of it, which is included in this, to wit, the eternity of his love. There is nothing infinitely great and good, which is not eternal. That love in the bosom of our blessed Lord Jesus knows no beginning, but eternity: and shall know no period, but eternity! We are now inclosed between infinite love from eternity before, reaching and going forth into eternity after. O what immense love would we stand in need of, that love which knows no beginning, and is ignorant of all period! We must give over all measuring here, and rather sit down and confess our ignorance. O what divine and evangelic eloquence were requisite for the man that would speak upon this subject! He that went farthest in the knowledge of this, put no other notion upon it than this, 'grace unsearchable, and love passing knowledge.' And what can we speak of that which is unsearchable? What suitable expression can the wit or invention of man reach to point it forth unto you? What can we know of that which passeth knowledge? Here is that mystery which is the eternal admiration of angels? They wonder because they cannot know; for admiration doth speak their ignorance.

In these words that we have read, we have our blessed Lord Jesus satisfying the desire of this holy man. It was his desire that he should proclaim his name unto him; and here he receives satisfaction to his desire. It is he only himself that can best frame his discourse of himself, or resolve that question, What he is. It were boldness and presumption in angels and men to attempt the resolution of that question, What is God? We may speak these names over unto you: and we conceive, that though we should spend all the time allotted for this exercise, in reading over these two verses, they should speak more than empty man, who would be wise, can do. What can we add to his words, who is infinitely wise? However, be convinced, that these are but parts of his ways, and how little a portion of him is heard! Our greatest attainments, as long as we are here, do but consist in some confused and dark apprehensions of that blessed Majesty. Our most mediate sight of him, who is invisible, is, as it were, that we did behold a man's back; which pointeth forth a great degree of estrangement; that immediate beholding of him, is the fruit of that land that is above: and O that time would sweetly pass, that long eternity may come in, when the faith of these things which we seek might vanish into sight? Now, with what terror and astonishment should men have spo-

ken, or thought of all the holy attributes of God, if he had not heard this; and likewise of his discourse, viz. the mercy of God? It is more confounding and astonishing than the apprehensions of his Omnipotency; no man could endure it, had it not been sweetened by the apprehensions of his love and goodwill: that should have been our speech, which was the saying of one under the sad apprehensions of wrath, 'To be above God. What were more terrible, than the apprehensions of justice, 'which will in no wise clear the guilty, nor let the transgressor pass free?' Had not mercy satisfied justice, had not our blessed Lord Jesus sweetened the way, how would that implacable hatred betwixt justice and transgressions been taken out of the way? What more terrible than the thoughts and apprehensions of holiness, 'who is of purer eyes than that he can behold iniquity, and doth loath to converse with those that are sinners?' But mercy hath tempered that strictness that was in him; so that now, 'though he be that holy and just One, who inhabits eternity, yet he is content to dwell with sinners, and to have his tabernacle with men.' We think, among all these blessed mysteries that mercy hath produced and brought to light, these are two; *first*, that God, who is light, and who is holiness itself, should condescend to have communion with those, 'who drink in iniquity as water.' *Secondly*, This likewise is a mystery, that God, who is light, should converse with man, who is so full of spots and blemishes, and yet not be defiled. We may be afraid to multiply our words of him. It involves an eternal and everlasting contradiction, and impossibility to unfold this attribute of the mercy of God. We think, it is not ignorance, but the greatest degree of knowledge, that makes us give our assent to that great truth, that his love to us is wonderful, passing the love of women! There is a great difference betwixt the mysteries of nature, and the mysteries of religion. The more we search for the mysteries of nature, they are the more plain and distinct to us: but the more we search for the mysteries of religion, the more mysterious and dark do they appear. We conceive, that the souls of just men now made perfect, would speak to that truth with great assurance, that his grace and mercy is more unsearchable, than it was the first day they began to study it. All our knowledge of that blessed attribute doth consist in this, to know 'that it passeth knowledge.' Light is not here the daughter of time, neither is light here the daughter of eternity. We shall still remain ignorant of this holy and blessed mystery. O to search, till we find it to be above search; and to know it, 'till we find it passing knowledge.'

Now, we shall speak to this attribute of mercy in these heads.

I. We shall propose some considerations and thoughts, that



we would have the Christian minding when he begins to study the mercy and love of God.

II. We shall propose some ways and means, how a Christian shall attain unto the solid knowledge of this attribute of mercy.

III. We shall speak of the qualifications of the mercy and love of God.

IV. We shall speak a little to these advantages that a Christian may have by the solid faith and apprehension of the mercy and love of God.

V. We shall point out some great impediments, that are the occasion why we make so small a progress in the faith of this attribute of mercy. Then,

I. These considerations and thoughts, that a Christian should have when he begins to study the attribute of mercy.

The *first* is this. be much in the consideration of his highness and absolute sovereignty. We think, this method is in some part holden forth to us, that before God doth propose his name of mercy, he doth take unto himself the name of Jehovah, which points forth unto us his highness. We think, your faith upon the mercy of God, without the solid apprehension of the highness of God, doth degenerate into presumption, and makes the Christian to pass these ways and coverings that are fixed between that infinite Majesty, and those who are the dust of his feet. We should always think, that the thoughts of his highness do not diminish nor impair the thoughts of his mercy, lest our faith should be degenerate into an anxious misbelief, and discouragement of spirit: knowing, that though he be great, yet he is good; though he be that majestic One, yet know that he is merciful. Now the advantage that a Christian may have by taking this along with him, when he begins to study this attribute of mercy, is this:

*First*, All the mercies we receive from God, they shall seem wondrous unto us, when we have our thoughts much taken up with his highness. We think, there is no mercy that a Christian doth meet with, but it may commend itself; but this super-added circumstance, it is from that high and holy One that inhabits eternity, makes a wonder to Christians! This was the way that Mary took to heighten and magnify his mercy to her, Luke i. 49. 'He that is mighty hath done to me great things, and holy is his name. The apprehensions of his highness made her to put higher note of respect and estimation upon her favours that she received: this was likewise the practice of holy David, 2 Sam. vii. 18. 'Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my father's house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?' There is a strange emphasis in that word, *Thou*, importing thus much, 'That though I had

received that favour from another, it should not have been marvellous in mine eyes; but coming from thee, it doth occasion admiration.'

The *second* advantage that a Christian doth reap, by taking along with him the thoughts of God's highness, when he begins to study the mercy and love of God, is this, the thoughts of his highness doth humble the Christian, and compose the spirit with holy fear and reverence; which are a preparatory for the Christian's laying hold on mercy. We must sit down and cover our lips, and cry out, 'We are unclean;' we must make our dwelling in the dust, before mercy should visit us. Highness in God must humble the Christian, and bring him low in his own estimation before mercy do exalt and set him on high. We must subscribe the law, before we subscribe the gospel. We must dwell all upon mount Ebal, which was the mount of cursing, and cry forth against ourselves, 'cursed be he that continueth not in all things that are written in the law: before we dare venture to dwell upon mount Gerizzim, which was the mount of blessings, and draw forth that conclusion, 'blessed is that man whose God is the Lord.' We must sit low through the consideration of his highness, before we can be exalted on high by the consideration of his mercy. Half-representations of God are always false representations of him. We think, if we look upon his highness, and take him up as clothed with righteousness, as with a robe, and doth not likewise take him up as clothed with mercy, we shall fall in some extremity.

The *third* advantage by this method, is this, it makes a Christian stand in awe of the goodness of God. What is the great reason that we turn the grace of God into wantonness? Is it not because of the want of the solid faith of his highness more engraven upon our spirits? Fear to offend his goodness, and to provoke that glorious and terrible name, 'The Lord our God.' It should be more in request with us. These are two inseparable companions, the faith of his highness, and the fear to offend this God; they die and live together, they wax and decay together: we may allude to that word, 2 Sam. i. 23. 'They were pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided.'

The *second* consideration which we would have the Christian to take along with him, when he begins to study the mercy and love of God, is this; know that it is natural and native for him to love; justice is his strange act, Isa. xxviii. 21. Importing his great unwillingness to be much taken up in the exercise of that attribute of justice. If we would ask the question, What God is? We could have no answer so suitable and pertinent to it, as that which he hath given himself, 'He is merciful and loving.' It



is his great design, and likewise his desire to be taken up in his attribute of mercy. Had not man fallen from that blessed subordination unto the holy will of God, we should not have known what it is to behold the exercise of that attribute of mercy. But man, by his fall, did close the door upon mercy, and open a door unto justice, that he might take vengeance on what ones were not made perfect: for man found out many inventions unto himself. And we conceive, that which doth eminently declare how much he delights in mercy, and how natural it is for him to love, is this, that notwithstanding there was a strong and invincible impediment laid in the way of the exercise of the attributes of mercy, which if angels and men had attempted to have loosed, should eternally have crushed and depressed them into the lowest hell. Yet love was not hindered in its exercise by this strong impediment. O blessed be that love, for it was strong; and that good-will, for it was wonderful; that when there was such an impediment laid in the way, did put wisdom in exercise to find out the way how it might exercise itself towards man, without leaving an imputation on justice! It likewise put Omnipotent power to exercise, that it might exercise the decrees of wisdom, that were such a holy and divine impotence on the love of God, that before the curse was proclaimed towards man, for the breach of his holy law, love did propose the way how that everlasting curse, which man by his own hand had wrapped about his own neck, might be taken away: now Christians, by the consideration of this, may receive three advantages.

*First*, We may be convinced, when we are under a rod and correction for sin, of the guiltiness of our sin; we may say that which Eliphaz said, ‘Is not our sin great, and our transgressions infinite?’ When he, who delights in mercy, begins to strike, he doth, as it were, contradict his own delights. When he begins to take vengeance on man for his inventions, he is clothed with a holy reluctancy to punish those whom he has loved.

The *second* advantage is this, it is a notable help to remove our unbelief, and the discouragement of our spirits, which we contradict by the reflecting on our iniquities, and the abominations of our hearts. We think we may multiply the causes of our unbelief; but all of them may be reduced unto this, the want of the solid faith of this, that he is one that delights in mercy! Were the divine light of his holy truth more darted in upon our hearts, all our misbelief should soon vanish, and remove out of the way. These, as it were, by not employing his mercy, do put off a piece of his delight, that it is his rejoicing to magnify his mercy towards men! And it is his great regret that sinners will not come.



The *third* advantage is this, it is a strong provocation unto the faith of the promises. We think, that the reason why we exercise faith so little upon the precious words of promise, is one of these two, *first*, Either the want of the solid faith of his Omnipotency, and that he is one from whom no thoughts can be hidden or withholden, and to whom there is nothing too hard. This was the occasion of Zacharias's unbelief, Luke i. 18. 'How shall such a thing be?' His finite and shallow reason could not reach a possibility of the being of these things which were above nature. Or, *secondly*, the reason of our misbelief is, the want of the solid faith of that infinite goodness and delight that is in him to do good to us.

The *fourth* advantage that a Christian may have by this is, it is a strong provocation to a Christian, after he hath fallen by his iniquity, and hath played the harlot with many lovers, yet to return unto him, who is merciful, and doth not retain his anger for ever. This was the argument that our blessed Lord used to these in Jer. iii. 12. 'Return to me, saith the Lord, O back-sliding Israel, for I am merciful, and will not keep anger for ever.' We think, it is a small mends, after we have wearied ourselves in the greatness of our way, therefore come, and let us return unto him, who is merciful, and doth not retain his anger for ever. We shall only say this by the way, that when ye are overtaken in any snare, do not quite your faith of your interest in God; when ye lose your feet, do not lose your grips. We think, the edge and strength of convictions are taken off, when the faith of our interest is removed; we think there is nothing so confounding and astonishing to the Christian, as that he should have provoked him, we shall not speak any more, but desire that ye may go down in this depth, and behold the wonders of the Lord. O but it were a sweet and holy diversion of all our anxious thoughts, to be solacing ourselves in the blessed contemplations of the mercy and love of God! This would make time short and long. It would make it long, for ye should be breathing after the day, when ye should know this love more. It would make time short, for that perfect solace that ye should have in it. The thoughts of his love should make you forget your misery, and remember your povery no more, if we belong to him. Time and eternity should be spent in the study of this holy and delectable mystery. We think, that all our idols should soon be hanged; our idols of faith, if we had the faith of his mercy. Our idols of love, if we had the faith of his mercy: our idols of fear, if we had the faith of his mercy. Whom should we trust but God? Whom should we love but God? Whom should we fear but God? We think that Christianity,

in leaving the world and all things that are here, and desiring to take God for our portion. O when shall there be such a holy and divine captivity of all the desires of our spirits, as to have them taken up in the consideration of him, who is mercy, and love, and goodness!

*Now to him who is love, be praise in heaven and earth. Amen.*

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### SERMON IX.

MAL. iii. 6. *For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.*

IT is an unchangeable and irrevocable statute of heaven, that cannot be recalled, that as long as we are here below in the land of our exile, being strangers from our Father's house, we must live by faith, and not by sight. Therefore we must submit unto these dark discoveries of those things that we have, that are most precious and excellent, until that day shall be, when faith, that is the evidence of things not seen, shall sweetly be changed into an immediate beholding of them. And O what a blessed day shall that be, when faith and hope shall both cease, and give way to sight! when these two cardinal graces shall go to take their leave of us, and sense shall go in, and we then shall eternally solace ourselves in beholding of him that is now invisible; and sense shall solace itself in these sweet fruits and trophies of the victory of faith and hope! O the infinite satisfaction and joy these have, that have their dwelling there! such new wine as they drink of, must not be put into such old bottles as we are, else we would burst asunder. 'But new wine must be put into new bottles, that both of them may be preserved.' And if he would condescend to draw by a lap of that vail, wherewith he is now covered from our eyes, and that he should now appear in the glory of his unspeakable Majesty, we should all fall dead at his feet, and there should no more strength remain with us. It were a question difficult to determine, whether the most pleasant manifestations that God can give of himself to his own, whilst they are here below, should provoke more joy than reverence, and more fear than rejoicing? And sure we are, fear of him who is that unchangeable Majesty, is more suitable for us whilst we are here, than to rejoice and be glad. O that unsuitableness we are under, which renders us so incapable, were once removed, and taken out of the way, and we for ever advanced to that unspeakable dignity, 'as to see him as he is!' We must say by the way, O what is that one word, 'To see God as he is?'

We must delay the exposition of it, until we have the pos-