

## DIRECTIONS AND INSTIGATIONS

TO THE DUTY OF

## P R A Y E R.

## SERMON I.

I THESS. v. 17. *Pray without ceasing.*

GODLINESS is so sublime and divine a thing, and doth so highly elevate the believer who is endued with it, that by it he is admitted unto that high pinnacle of honour, and inconceivable pitch of dignity, as to be made like unto God, and to have a glorious participation of his divine nature; so that we need not much rhetoric to commend this unto you, who have tasted of the sweetness of it; 'for wisdom will be justified of her children,' Matth. xi. 19. But there are some of you who savour not the things of God, and to whom these things do appear but as some Utopian fancy, and notions of a man's brain, who are not much in contemplation of these things. So that though we could speak upon this subject, in such a manner, as that the glorious light of it should surround us, yet the blind heart cannot see it, because there is a dungeon within; and till Christ open our eyes, (as well as reveal his light) we cannot be enlightened by it. But had we once as much divine understanding, as to take it up in its beauty and necessity, in its advantage and dignities, in its comeliness and equity we should esteem it the principal thing which we have to do in all our lifetime, and should 'dig for it, as for hid treasure,' Prov. ii. 4. And there is no part of this royal and beautiful ornament of godliness, but it may commend and ingratiate itself to any who do not close their eyes. And amongst all the beautiful effects and parts of godliness, this duty and grace of prayer is not the least, and doth not a little commend it, and though it appear sometimes little among the thousands of the graces of the Spirit yet out of it have come excellent things, and it hath not counted it presumption to compare itself with the highest and chiefest. It is that (no doubt) by which a soul is elevated to converse and talk with God, with the holy and blessed Trinity; yea, and that as often and freely as the Christian pleaseth: for there is a door of access standing always open, by which we may enter in and communicate and impart our thoughts to God, and to have him

making known his mind to us. O this is a dignity and a privilege that hath been purchased unto us at an infinite rate and value, even the precious blood of Christ; for, no doubt, the door of our access unto God is through the vail of his flesh: and were this more deeply engraven upon our spirits, we should improve this dignity more; did we once believe the unspeakable highness of this duty of prayer, and the incomprehensible essence of God, that which we now neglect through ignorance, we should fear to meddle with it through a sort of reverence and fear, being "afraid to touch the mount, lest we should be shot through," and looking upon ourselves as unworthy to lift up our eyes to heaven, because we have reproached him so often.

Now there are these two comprehensible and cardinal evils, which do exceedingly mar and intercept the obedience of Christians unto this great and precious command of 'praying without ceasing,' and they are these two, atheism and idolatry; too much confidence in ourselves, and too much leaning to our own understanding which is idolatry, it being a visible breach of the first command, 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me, Exod. xx. 3. And too little confidence and trusting in God, which is our atheism, employing ourselves in all, and employing God in nothing: so that our blessed Lord may propose that unanswerable challenge and question to many of us, 'Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name?' John xvi. 24. And what is this practice, but involving of ourselves in that woful curse, "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, whose heart departeth from the Lord; should the living seek the dead and not their God? who giveth to men all things liberally to enjoy," Jer. xvii. 5. Were we dwelling more under the spiritual impression of our inability and impotency to save ourselves, and that complete ability and infinite power which is in him to help us, we would bind this precious command of prayer, as a chain of gold about our neck, and make it 'an ornament of grace to our head,' Prov. iv. 9. We should certainly be constrained to cry forth, "All that the Lord hath commanded us, we will do," Deut. v. 27. And pray that there may be such a heart given to us, as to have our practice correspondent unto our resolutions.

O! what a glorious and unspeakable dignity suppose you it to be, to be daily having your walk in heaven, in those 'beautiful streets that are all paved with transparent gold;' and to be conversing with him, whose fellowship is of more infinite worth than all imperial dignities. A Christian who is much exercised in prayer, may have this to say when he is passing through the gates of death to long and endless eternity, that he is now to change his place, but not his company; heaven to him is

but a blessed transition to a more constant and immediate enjoyment of God. O what a blessed day, suppose ye it to be, when ye shall be altogether without the reach of the necessity of this duty, and whole exercise of the grace of prayer? For though it be a blessed and most divine exercise, yet it involves an imperfection in its bosom; and so it must needs pass away, 'when that which is perfect shall come,' 1 Cor. xiii. 10. O to be much in correspondence with him, and in maintaining communion and fellowship with him! "Ask of him although it were to the half of his kingdom; 'yea more,' Whatsoever ye ask in his name, according to his will, and what he sees fit in his wisdom for your good, believing, he will grant it you," Matth. xxi. 22. and will not deny you. We conceive, there is not such a comprehensive promise annexed to any duty as this; in a manner, it is the sweet compend and epitome of all Christian promises. What is included here? All things for your good are here included, and nothing of that kind excluded. We confess, if our enjoyments were regulated according to our desires, they should come far short of that which we stand in need of, and much more would they come short of that which he is willing to give: and therefore we are blessed in this, that he walketh not in dispensations to us by the rule of our desires, but by that precious rule of his free and condescending grace; for he is able to give unto us 'exceeding abundantly above all that we are able to ask or think,' Eph. iii. O if ye would ask, what is the great and eminent exercise which a Christian ought to have while he is here below? Believe it, I could give no answer so suitable, as prayer. And if it were asked, *secondly*, What ought to be the great and eminent exercise of a Christian while he is here? It is prayer. 'Pray above all things, and above all things prayer,' I mean, true, serious, sincere, and not hypocritical prayer; a pleasant retiring and diverting ourselves from all other things, to wrestle with God; to leave our servants and our asses at the foot of the mount, until we go up and worship God, and bury our idols under the vale of Shechem; and to wash ourselves from our pollutions, when we go up to Bethel; to return from the confused noise of the multitude of our affairs, unto the pleasant delighting ourselves in God. A Christian (the sound of whose feet is much heard in the streets of the new Jerusalem, who in a manner, is anticipating the time of his endless enjoyment of it; and who is daily bringing down heaven unto earth, or rather elevating himself towards heaven, hearing of such an endless command as this, 'Pray without ceasing,' Rom. xii. 12.) is constrained to cry forth, "Lord, what is man that thou should be mindful of him? Or the son of man, that thou should visit him, and that thou hast

so highly magnified him?" Psalm viii. 4. I conceive if a Christian would look upon all the duties of religion under a right notion and apprehension, certainly he will rather take them up as his dignity, than his duty, and rather as the singular tokens and significations of the infinite respect and love of God towards him, than any ways given and commanded him. Seeing by the practice of them, we shall testify our thankfulness and obedience towards him; surely it were our servitude, and not our liberty, to be freed from this blessed and glorious work of his commandments. O what a bondage were it for an immortal soul, not always to be living in a direct line of subordination to him? But a natural man, hearing of this decree and command of God coming forth, 'Pray without ceasing,' will cry out, 'This is a hard saying, who can hear it!' John vi. 60. We ought to study to be subordinate to God, and in subjection unto nothing which may hinder our subordination unto him: and he who counts the service of the Lord a weariness, and doth snuff at it, as it were, and who never knew what it was to be bound in the spirit, till he go to prayer; believe me, that man is not much taken up in the obedience of this noble and most excellent commandment, 'Pray without ceasing.'

Now being come to the words: having spoken at large of that radical and noble grace of faith, we are come to speak of this excellent grace of prayer, and I would have none of you mistake the nature of this command or excellent grace: or to conceive that the apostle doth here so abridge Christian duties, as to confine them within this one duty and grace of prayer, so that we should constantly be taken up with this exercise, and so neglect all other duties. No, surely this is not the meaning, for the words going before the text may remove this mistake, 'Rejoice evermore,' 1 Thess. v. 16. But we conceive it holds out these things to us:

*First*, That in all our lawful diversions and interruptions from this divine exercise and employment in this noble duty and grace of prayer, we may be keeping ourselves in a praying frame and disposition, so that, when occasion presents itself to us, we may retire from the noise of our secular affairs, and converse with him; a practice unknown to the most part of the Christians of this generation, who, betwixt the time of their conversing with God, and their address to his throne, gives leave to wander after many vain impertinences, and to rove abroad in the path of their idols, and to entangle themselves with the affairs of this world; so that (in a manner) they are incapacitated for this holy and divine exercise of the duty of prayer, which doth require much divine abstractness from the world, and the

things thereof, and much composedness of spirit, which our involving of ourselves too much in our affairs (that do but by the way belong to us) doth so much interrupt and hinder us; and this observation, 'Pray without ceasing,' holds forth unto us, that there is no condition, nor estate of life wherein we can be placed, that exempteth us from the necessity and obedience of being much in the exercise of this noble and excellent duty of the grace of prayer. For if we be under bonds, we must pray that we may be enlarged; and if he lift up the light of his countenance upon us, we must pray that we may be helped to walk humbly with God, and to erect to ourselves a dwelling in the dust, when he erecteth to us a throne in heaven, and to be enabled not to stir him up, nor awake him before he please. God hath, in the depth of his infinite wisdom and unsearchable love towards man, so ordered it, that continual dependence upon him is both our duty and dignity.

And then, *secondly*, It holds out this unto us, that in the midst of all our business, and other affairs that we go about, we ought to be sending forth secret and divine ejaculations toward God. This practice was no mystery unto Jacob, for in the midst of his testament, having blessed six of his sons, and having other six to bless, he breaks forth with that divine thought, 'I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord,' Gen. xlix. 18. Neither was this a mystery unto godly Nehemiah, who, while he was standing before the king, with the cup in his hand, did pray unto the Lord in his secret and silent way, Neh. ii. 4. 'He prayeth unto the God of heaven.'

And then, *lastly*, This command and exhortation, 'Pray without ceasing,' holds forth this unto us, that we should lay hold, yea more, that we should watch to lay hold upon every opportunity for this duty of prayer; yea more, that we should labour upon all occasions to enjoy this admirable dignity, which is the scope of that noble command, 1-Pet. iv. 7. "But (saith he) the end of all things is at hand, be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer." A practice, alas! that is not now much in request, and that the Christians in this generation do very much undervalue and set at nought. We conceive, that which so much interrupts our obedience unto this command of praying in public, and in praying one with another, is either our atheism, or our pride; we being more afraid to speak before men, than to speak before God, which is our atheism; so that our silence is rather from our reverence of men, than from our reverence of God. And then our pride hinders us from it, we being afraid, lest going about that duty, we discover our nakedness, and make our shame appear; and in our impertinent de-

nials of our obedience unto this desire, we study to cover the matter with a pretext of humility, and to gain reputation amongst men, that pride is hid from our eyes, and that we will walk low, when in the mean time we sit on high places: and certainly, that which doth so much obstruct our liberty, and our having access unto God in our praying one with another, is our greater fear of those before whom we pray, than of him whom we pray to: and, no doubt the divine impression of a Deity upon our hearts, would make us overcome this. Or it is our pride that hinders us from high thoughts of God, and hinders and interrupts this holy and divine exercise of the grace of prayer, even ourselves: which is the great Dianathat we so much adore, and about the adorning of which, and her silver shrines, (to speak so) much of our talk and labour is spent: we still proposing that woful end in all our actions, the exalting of ourself, and attaining reputation amongst men: and therefore it comes to pass, that there is little or no advantage redounding to us by the exercise of public prayer: so that we may say that which one spake to another purpose, *Cum inter homines fui minor homo rediui*, for we may say this that when we have been amongst Christians, we do oftentimes return less Christians; for if in our praying one with another, we be answered according to the idols of our heart, and have liberty of words, and perhaps some real access to the throne of grace, when God lifts up, we lift up ourselves 'being exalted above measure, and sacrificing to our own net, and making a secret feast to our dagon, within the temple of our hearts, proving ourselves to be but empty 'vines, bringing forth fruits unto ourselves,' Hosea x. 1. And hence it is, if a Christian will observe it, that he doth not advance much in the work of mortification by his public enlargements, and that the power of iniquity in him is not much restrained by them but presently after his weeping over himself for some short coming, some new temptation presenting itself, involves him in the like, or, it may be in a worse sin: and ordinarily our public enjoyment and enlargements are not constant and permanent from our quenching his Holy Spirit. However, by the way, we would say that which a Heathen said, "It is much for a man to be as serious alone in the exercise of his mind and affection, in pursuing after these duties, as when he is in company:" and that which exceedingly hinders a man's obedience when he is alone unto this command, 'Pray without ceasing,' is either the want of a solid conviction of the necessity of this duty, or else it flows from not being convinced of the advantage that may be found in this exercise of our secret retirements with God, and abstracting ourselves from the noise

of the world to converse with him. What joy in the Holy Ghost? What mortification of our idols? What divine conformity and likeness of the Lord's blessed and glorious image might we attain to by this? As likewise, we may superadd this, the want of the solid conviction of those unspeakable disadvantages that are to be found in our woful neglecting and sinful suspending of the exercise of this duty when we are alone, which are best known to those who are most conversant with their own spirits: but sure we are, 'Through the slothfulness of our hands, our houses droppeth through, and our building doth decay,' and we are become remarkable servants unto our lust and corruptions.

Now is there any of you that, at the very reading of these words, 'Pray without ceasing,' may not retire himself, and judge himself eminently guilty of the breach of this commandment and excellent duty? That whereas Eliphaz did accuse Job, 'Thou restrainest prayer before God,' Job xv. 4. Surely he may justly charge it upon many; yea, alas! upon most of the Christians of this generation. There are many, here I fear, who do pass under the notion of saints and real Christians, who did never much study to obey this command; there are many here who need not much arithmetic to calculate all the prayers that they have poured out before his throne. O! whither is your devotion gone? If David and Daniel were now alive, would not their practice condemn the Christians of this generation, who morning, at noon, and at even-tide, did call upon him, yea, in the silent watches of the night, and at midnight did rise, 'and seek their Maker, who gives unto his own their songs in the saddest nights of their affliction?' We conceive, also if Anna, that precious woman, were now alive, to whom that excellent testimony is given, Luke. ii. 57. "She was a widow about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fasting and praying, night and day;" might she not provoke many women, yea, and all men and women, unto an holy emulation in this so singular and divine a practice? Alas! there are none now-a-days upon whom so brave a testimony could be passed as upon her. We may either conceive, that the way to heaven is more easy than it was in ancient times, or else that there is not so much delight and solace to be had in him as was before; were we daily tasting of 'that pure river of life that flows out from beneath the throne of God,' and of its sweetness, 'which causeth the lips of those that are asleep speak;' we would be more taken up in giving obedience unto this precious command of prayer; and if we were sleeping more in the bed of love, we would be less sleeping in the bed of security; we would likewise embrace more abstractedness from

the world, and more familiarity with God. O! but our visits are rare, because we are not constant in prayer, and fervent in spirit, seeking the Lord. It is no wonder that we forget what an one he is, because it is long since we did behold him, we may forget his form and loveliness, there is such a number of days and woful space of time intervening betwixt our enjoyment of him.

Now we shall not dwell long in pointing out unto you what prayer is; we conceive, it is a sweet travelling and trafficking of the soul betwixt emptiness and fulness, betwixt our inability to help ourselves, and his ability to help us; the one deep calling unto the other deep; or, in short, it is a soul's conference with God.

Neither shall we stand in proving this unto you, that it is the duty of a Christian to be much engaged in the exercise of prayer. The text doth sufficiently prove it; but we shall only for the clearing up of this, point out one place of scripture, and that is in Eph. vi. 18. where we are exhorted to 'pray with all manner of prayer and supplication, &c.' Which we conceive to be understood both of public and private prayer, and that we should not be in the exercise of these by starts and fits, but that we should continue in them with all perseverance, as the text doth clearly hold forth.

Neither shall we insist long in speaking unto this, what is the spirit of prayer; we conceive, it doth not stand in that promptness and volubility of language that we use before him, for there may be much of that, and little of the Spirit; and, upon the contrary, there may be little of that or nothing at all, and yet much of the Spirit; yea, we are certain, that the Spirit is sometimes an impediment unto much language; for either in our presenting or expressing our grief before God, our spirits are so overwhelmed within us, and so troubled, that we cannot speak, so that sighs or silent groans are rather our oratory, than the multitude of words: so likewise in the exercise of joy, the soul is so filled, and in a manner overshadowed with the Holy Ghost, that the Christian is wrapt up in holy admiration and astonishment, so that in a manner he loses not only the exercise of invention but also the exercise of speech: he is so much taken up in gazing at that which he doth enjoy and in beholding and contemplating him who hath ravished him with one of his eyes, and with one chain of his neck, so that he can speak no more, but beginneth to wonder, his tongue cleaveth to the roof of his mouth, and his judgment is confounded with the inexpressible sweetness and glory of him that appeareth, and his affection doth so swell and run over all its banks, that (in a manner) (he is clothed with a blessed impossibility to have the use of

his tongue, and therefore he begins to admire that which he cannot speak: however, he that 'hath much of these things, hath nothing over, and he that hath little, hath no lack.'

Neither doth the spirit of prayer consist in the fineness and eloquence of our dictions, these things being rather to prove ourselves orators than such as pray in the Holy Ghost.

But we conceive, it doth more consist in the voice of the affection than the voice of words, and having unexpressible and unutterable sighs and groans of the spirit, which is indeed that true spirit of adoption, which he hath given unto us, whereby we cry unto him 'Abba Father,' Gal. iv. 6. If we speak no more in prayer, than what our affections and soul speaketh, truly we would not speak much: if we speak more with zeal and affection, the vain prolixity that we have in the duty of prayer, would be much compendized and abridged. Neither shall we speak long on this, how much it is of a Christian's concernment to be convinced of the absolute necessity of a Mediator, and of a Days-man, that must lay his hand upon us in all our approaches to God. And truly we conceive, if many of you were posed, when last the deep impression of the need that you have of Jesus Christ; and of him that hath taken that glorious title and attribute unto himself, of being the Counsellor, Isa. ix. 6. were engraven upon your spirits, when ye went to prayer, you should find it a difficulty to fall upon the number of the days; and I conceive that the want of the apprehensions and uptakings of God, and of ourselves, is the reason why this great mystery, and divine duty of the gospel, viz. the employing of Jesus Christ in prayer, is so great a mystery both unto our judgments and affections. However know, that this is a duty belonging both to our knowledge and practice. There are many Christians, who, to their own apprehensions, have made great progress in the course of Christianity, who yet may turn back, and learn that great and fundamental lesson, to call on his name. Sure we are, were this more believed, that 'God is a consuming fire' without Jesus Christ, we should not be so presumptuously bold as to approach before God, either in public or in private, without him, who by his blood must quench this divine flame, and who must remove the angel that stands with the flaming sword in his hand, marring our access to God, Christ must be to us 'Melchisedec, a king of righteousness and of peace.'

He, no doubt, is that tristing place in which God and sinners must meet; he is that glorious ladder that reaches from heaven to earth, by which we must ascend up to God; his humanity (which is the foot of the ladder) is the door of our access by which we must ascend up to the top, which is his divinity; we

did once by our iniquity fix a gulf betwixt God and us; but Jesus Christ, by taking on our nature, did make a golden bridge over that gulf, by which we may go over and converse with God.

And *first*, Surely the want of this conviction doth make us come with less confidence unto him, for upon what can ye build your hope, except it be upon that 'stone of Israel, and in his beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased?' Matth. iii. 17. We ought to rest upon him, who is 'Immanuel, God with us.'

2. The want of this is the cause of the little reverence that you have to God in your approaches unto him; for did we once take him up under this notion, how inaccessible God is except he be made accessible by him, who 'is the way, the truth, and the life,' John xiv. 6. O! how would we fear to draw near to such a holy God.

3. And this likewise is the occasion of the little delight; we have in conversing with him, we are persuaded that there is no delight in this blessed exercise, but through him who is the *vision of peace* betwixt the Father and us; his divine nature is an impregnable rock, which we cannot scale but by his human nature, and we must make use of Christ in all our approaches to God, not only as one who must give us access unto him, and open a door unto us, through which we must enter into the holiest of all, (he must draw aside the vail that is hanging over his face, and we must go in walking at his back; as is clear, Rom. v. 2.) but we must likewise make use of Christ in all our approaches unto God, as one by whom we must be enabled to do every thing he calleth for at our hands. If the faith of that saying, which is in John xv. 5. 'Without me ye can do nothing,' were more deeply engraven and stamped upon the tables of our hearts, we would be walking alongst our pilgrimage with the sentence of death in our bosom, and have our confidence fixed on him above; for there is not only an inability in ourselves to do any thing, but also we are clothed with a woful impossibility as that word doth hold forth, 'without me ye can do nothing.' And certainly, the lower we will descend in the thoughts of our strength, we are the more fit to receive this divine influence from him, by which we are capacitated and rendered able for the doing of every duty. We must likewise make use of Jesus Christ in all our approaches unto God, as one before whom all our prayers must be accepted before him. The sacrifices of J udah cannot come up with acceptance upon that golden altar before the throne, except they be presented by him 'who is that great Master of request;' this is clear from Rev. viii. whereby the angel that is spoken of there, we understand to be the mes-

senger of the covenant; and by that incense we understand the merits of Jesus Christ, which is that precious vail that is spread over these sinful imperfections of our duties, which they must be mixed with, before they be an acceptable savour unto God. O! how doth he abominate and abhor all our prayers, if they want this precious ingredient, that sweet-smelling incense, the merits of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ! It is he who removeth all those rovings, and vain impertinencies that we have in the exercise of prayer, and doth present them in a more divine frame and contexture. He reduces them in a few words, and makes them more effectual for the obtaining of our requests. If the consideration of this were more with us, O how would it make Jesus Christ more precious in our eyes? As likewise it would discover unto us a more absolute necessity in having our recourse to him in all our approaches to God: such is the depth of the unsearchable grace of Christ, and of his infinite love towards sinners, that the voice of complaining on them was never heard in heaven: Christ never spake evil, but always good of believers before his Father, notwithstanding he hath oftentimes spoken reproofs to themselves; that is clear from John xvii. 8. where giving an account of the carriage and practice of his disciples unto his Father, he doth exceedingly commend their faith and their carriage towards him, and saith, 'They have received me, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me:' and yet in John xiv. 1. he doth challenge their unbelief: the one speech he directeth to God his Father, and the other he directeth to them. Love in a manner doth silence all the noise of complaints with him, and maketh him always breathe out love in his expressions of them before the throne. He will whiles be speaking roughly to believers themselves, but, to say with reverence to his blessed Name, he never telleth any ill tale of them behind their backs.

But now we shall insist a little in pointing out what things are convenient and suitable for a Christian to exercise himself unto, before he go about this divine and holy duty, in conversing and speaking to God.

And *First*, we think a Christian, before he come and take upon him this holy and divine exercise of talking with God, he ought to be much in the exercise of meditation, not only of the inconceivable highness and dignity of the glorious and inexpressible person with whom he is to converse, but also upon the inconceivable baseness and lowness of himself; so that by the consideration of the highness of the one, he may be provoked to reverence; and by the consideration of the other, he may be provoked to loathing.

1. A Christian before he go to prayer, should study to have a deep impression of those things which he is to make the matter of his supplication to God, and to have them engraven upon his heart; and truly we think the want of this, is oftentimes the occasion of that woful evil of lying unto the Holy Ghost; for we complain in prayer, and personate or counterfeit resentment for those things, which never before was the grief of our hearts. Oftentimes we speak many things with our lips, ere we study to have our hearts inditing those things that we speak. And likewise in the exercise of blessing and praising him from the consideration of any great desirable mercy, we do personate and feign joy from the consideration of these things, which before we never made the matter of our joy, because they were not much the subject of our consideration. It were, no doubt, the great advantage of the Christian in the exercise of prayer, to be much taken up in the obedience of this command, Eccl. v. 2. 'Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter any thing before God; for God is in heaven and thou upon earth, therefore let thy words be few.' Seldom doth the Christian look or speak with God, but, if he hath as much grace as to reflect upon it, he may be convinced that he is uttering things that are not fit to be spoken to God: O to be studying that divine abridgement of our prayers, which no doubt would speak nothing before him but what our hearts doth indite; there is something of this holden out in the practice of David; Psalm xlv. 1. where he beginneth with that, 'my heart doth indite a good matter:' and then he subjoins, 'my tongue is as the pen of a ready writer.' Our oratory might be more refined, and confined likewise; and it would be more effectual for the obtaining of our desires, if we were studying this. O that our hearts might speak more in prayer, and our tongues less. We through the multitude of business, produce multitude of dreams to ourselves.

*Thirdly,* This is likewise requisite for a Christian before he go to prayer, to be studying holiness, to endeavour to have his filthy garments wherewith he is clothed, changed with change of raiment; he must put off the shoes of his feet, 'because he is to go to stand upon holy ground.' This was the commendable practice of that holy man, David, Psalm xxvi. 6. 'I will wash mine hands in innocency: then will I compass thine altar, O Lord.' This is likewise clear from Exod. x. 18, 19. where Aaron and the sons of Levi were to wash their hands and their feet in the brasen laver, that did stand betwixt the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar, when they came near to minister or burn offerings by fire unto the Lord: we must likewise endea-

vour to symbolize the practice, and to have ourselves washen in the laver of regeneration, and in that 'precious fountain that is opened to the house of David, for sin and for uncleanness.' Zech. xiii. 1. Before we enter into the holiest of all, what ornament is so suitable, for one who is walking unto that higher palace, than that glorious ornament of holiness, without which we are rendered unacceptable to God, and with which we may with confidence and boldness go and serve him in his holy temple? No doubt, if the deep impression of that absolute holiness, and purity of that Majesty with whom we are to converse, (when we go to prayer) were engraven upon our spirits, we would study to be like him: for the foundation of friendship, and fellowship, doth somewhat stand in a similitude of natures, and somewhat in conformity one with another.

And, *lastly*, When a Christian is going to prayer, he ought to be much in the consideration of the advantage and dignity that is to be found in the exercise of this duty. This would make us more ardent and serious in the study of the former: and unless we superadd this to the rest, we cannot long continue in a constant endeavour after the attainment of these three former qualifications, which are required of one who would approach unto God.

Now we shall shut up our discourse, by speaking a little unto this, what ought to be the sweet companions of a Christian who is going about the exercise of this duty, in a serious, and not in a hypocritical manner.

1. He would study to have his spirit under the deep impression of a Deity, and consider this, that he is talking with one, before whom angels (these glorious and excellent spirits) do cover their faces with their wings. Which, no doubt doth point out the holy reverence that they have of him: the long familiarity and constant conversing with God hath not removed that due and proper distance, which they ought to keep with him: and certainly, were he known to us by no other name, than that of Merciful, yet ought we to fear the Lord and his goodness. O! how much more, when he who is made known and revealed to us by that great and terrible name, Jehovah, by which 'he is exalted above all names that are in heaven, or in earth,' Phil. ii. 9. And by which is pointed out that infinite distance that is betwixt God and us, No doubt if the impression of a Deity were with us, it would remove much formality that we use in prayer; it would likewise remove much of our misbelief, that we have in all our approaches unto him; were we afraid, lest that woful inscription that Paul did discern to be engraven on an altar at Athens, 'To the unknown God,' were found on us;

alas! I fear it may be engraven on most part of our devotions; and likewise that wherewith Christ did challenge the people of Samaria, he may challenge many of us, John iv. 23. And it may be written on our practice, 'Ye worship ye know not what: who are those who 'bless an idol,' and no doubt, such sacrifices as these, are 'as if we were offering swine's blood, and cutting off a dog's neck, which are an abomination unto God,' Isa. lxvi. 3.

II. The excellent grace of humility, should be the sweet companion of a Christian in the exercise of prayer. We must put off our ornaments, and clothe ourselves with sackcloth, and spread ashes upon our heads, when we begin to speak to him. He that sits nearest the dust, sits nearest the heavens. We must be walking under the impression of this, that we are not worthy to lift up our eyes to heaven; and with holy Abraham, (upon whose effigy this was engraven, James ii. 23. 'That he was a friend of God') when he begins to talk to this glorious and incomprehensible Majesty, (in a manner) he conceived it to be presumption, Gen. xviii. 27. 'Behold now (saith he), I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, who am but dust and ashes.' He doth prefix a note of admiration, 'Behold!' importing, that it was a bold adventure for so low a person to speak to so high a Majesty; or for so sinful a creature to open his mouth unto so pure and spotless an One, that the footstool should speak to him who is the Throne: and, no doubt, were this more our exercise, we might be receiving more remarkable significations of his respect and love towards us. What is the royal gift which he giveth to those that are humble? *Grace*; for as the apostle saith, James vi. 6. 'He giveth grace to the humble, &c.' His love is seeking that person that sits lowest, even as waters do seek the lowest ground. He that is first in his own estimation, is last in the estimation of God; but he that is last in his own estimation, is amongst the first in the estimation of God: therefore, no doubt, that is a suitable clothing for a person who is to go to the court of heaven, which the apostle Peter requireth, 1 Pet. v. 5. 'Be clothed with humility.' O! but that woful evil of pride, which doth either arise from our ignorance of ourselves, or from our ignorance of God, doth both obstruct our access unto him, and the return of our prayers. If we should give a description of the person who is permitted to detain Christ in his galleries, we could not give it a more suitable term than this, that he is of 'a humble and contrite spirit,' Isa. lxvi. 2. and lvii. 15.

III. And a *third* sweet companion of a Christian in the exercise of this duty of prayer, is faith and confidence in God, that we have to do with one who is 'the hearer of prayer, and who

is willing to give unto us all things that we desire, if we ask in faith, for we must exercise faith, not only upon his promises, but likewise upon that glorious and incommunicable attribute that is given unto him, Psalm lxxv. 1. that he is 'the hearer of prayer;' want of this, maketh us come little speed: and we likewise think that the want of this maketh us live so little in expectation, and wait with patience and hope at the posts of his doors, until we receive a return. Is it any wonder, that our prayers be 'as the beating of the air, and the pouring out of some empty words,' if we be not convinced of this, that he is not like unto us? God is not like Baal, who because of sleep, or some other business, cannot give present audience to our desires, so that we need not be constrained to cut ourselves with knives, or to leap upon the altar, to provoke him to cause fire to descend upon our altar, to burn our drowned sacrifices, he is as able to give audience to us, as if there were no other to employ him. Multitudes of supplications will be no interruption unto the audience of our desires; he hath that royal prerogative, and eminent excellency above all the judges of the earth, that he can take in many bills at once; which is a demonstration of the Omnipotency and infinite understanding and knowledge of God. If that word, Matth. xxii. 21, 22. were believed, 'Whatsoever you ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive it,' how would we study to have this necessary and sweet companion of faith alongst with us in all our prayers? And as James speaketh, chap. i. 6. 'He that asketh, let him ask in faith; for he that wavereth and doubteth, is as the waves of the sea, that can receiveth nothing.'

A *fourth* sweet companion in the exercise of prayer, is fervency. Can we live under such a woful delusion, as to conceive that God heareth those suits and petitions which we scarcely hear ourselves? Can we have much zeal in proposing our desires, when we do it with such woful indifferency? We have the example of that holy man, David, to commend this unto us, Psalm xxix. 12. where we may behold a glorious gradation and climax; for he says, 'Hear my prayer,' and that not being sufficient, he doth ascend one step higher, and saith, 'hold not thy peace at my cry,' that voice being a little louder than the voice of prayer; and yet again, he ascendeth one step farther, and saith, 'hold not thy peace at my tears.' These silent cries, the tears of a Christian, have most rhetoric, and loudest voice to heaven; their sweet emanations and flowings out of water, from that precious fountain of a contrite and broken spirit; they do, no doubt, ascend high, and have a great power with him, who is Almighty. Jacob (in a manner) did hold the angel that wrest-

led with him, with no other cord but with the cord of supplications, as is clear from Hosea xii. 4. and Gen. xxxii. 20. Did ever your eyes behold such cords and bonds made of tears? No doubt, these are of a beautiful frame and contexture, and of infinite more value, than the most precious and rare chains that the greatest princes in the world do wear as ornaments: and truly, the want of this proceedeth from the want of the solid conviction of the absolute necessity we stand in of these things; for as one well said, 'strong necessities, makes strong desires. And proceedeth also from the want of the consideration of the precious excellencies that are to be had in those things that we ask. The eminency of a thing doth increase vigour of pursuit after it, and maketh us, with seeking of it, mount up with wings as eagles over all the difficulties that lye as impediments in our way. Ought we not to be emulous of the practice of Nineveh: of whom this is recorded, 'That they cried mightily unto God,' Jonah iii. 8. We think many Christians of this generation (because of their woful remissness and coldness of affection in proposing their desires) may be constrained to mourn over all their mournings, and pray over all their prayers.

Now, if a Christian's heart be the temple of the Holy Ghost, O! how ought we to pray? For it is the diamond which the apostle puts in the upshot of all the graces of the Spirit, Eph. vi. 8. and after which he exhorteth Christians seriously to pursue. Oh! I think it is a mystery that we cannot well conceive; but those who are most in the exercise of it, can best resolve it, and take up its precious effects: but, believe me, it is one of the most dark mysteries that is to be found in the practice of a Christian, except he, in whom is all 'treasures of wisdom and knowledge,' to unfold this one divine sentence, 'Pray without ceasing;' it shall always remain a mystery to our obedience. It is a question, we confess, that is sometimes difficult to determine, whether some duties, which are commanded to be done by us, be more mysterious to our understanding to take up the nature of them, and what is commended in the lively and spiritual exercise of such a duty? Or whether they be most mysterious to us in our practice and obedience? We confess, it holdeth not alike in all things, it being more easy for us to know, than to practise many things: we conceive, it holdeth out in some, and even in those duties that are most obvious, (as we conceive) and that have least of the mysteriousness of the gospel engraven upon them, &c.

## SERMON II.

I THESS. v. 17. *Pray without ceasing.*

IT were for our great advantage, to be much taken up in the serious and divine consideration of that most sad, but most true saying, 'That many are called, but few are chosen:' yea, if there were but one of each twelve that are within this house to day, to whom Christ thus (sadly) should speak, 'one of you will betray me,' ought ye not all to be put to an holy enquiry and search, and say unto him, 'Master, is it I? Master is it I? and to be exceeding sorrowful, until that concerning question be determined unto you? How much more ought you to accomplish a secret and serious search, to know whether or not 'ye be written among the living in Jerusalem, and have passed from death to life?' Seeing, alas! I think it is more probable, that if precious Christ were to speak to each twelve that are within this house, we are afraid that he should thus (sadly) speak, 'There are eleven of you that shall betray me, and one shall only pass free.' And, oh! that the number of those who are to betray the precious Son of God, were reduced to so few, though indeed these be many.

If he, 'who seeth not as man seeth, who reproveth not after the hearing of the ear, nor after the seeing of the eye,' (who can reject an Eliab, the more fair in show and appearance, and can choose a stripling like David) were to give his verdict, and pass sentence on all that are here; oh! upon how many of our foreheads might this dreadful sentence be engraved, *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin*; 'Thou art weighed in the balance, and art found light.' I am afraid, that even some professors, who have a form of godliness, and yet have not the power thereof, and are likewise 'painted sepulchres, that are fair without, but within are full of dead men's bones;' he shall reject their confidence, and cut 'off their hopes as a spider's web.' Religion that is pure and undefiled, is another thing than we take it to be. We must not think to go to heaven in a bed of roses, we must strive, and earnestly contend to enter in at the strait gate.' And if ye would have a description of those who are shut out from the presence of the Lord, and who are of that woful number, to whom *Tophet is ordained of old*; the Psalmist giveth a description of them, Psalm xiv. 4. 'They call not upon God.' But, if we say, that this is the description of those who shall be eternally secluded from God's presence, that they pray not unto God, ye will then think, that ye are not of that list: for who is so hardened (say ye) as not to pray to

him who is Almighty, and pay that due homage unto him, who is the Creator of 'all the ends of the earth?'

But unto such athiests as these, I shall propose these four things, which if you are not able to give a positive answer unto, be persuaded that ye never knew what it was to pray unto God, so as to have your offerings coming up with acceptance upon his holy altar.

1. Did ye ever know what it was to go to prayer upon an internal principle of love, and the grace of Christ constraining you? Are there not many of you, O atheists! who do not know what this means, to have the precious bonds of love constraining and imposing a blessed necessity upon your hearts, to converse with God in prayer? Did ye ever know what it was to bind your 'sacrifices to the horns of the altar' by the cords of love?

2. Did ye ever know what it was by prayer to attain to more conformity with God, and to crucify your lusts? There are many, and I may say, some professors, to whom this is a mystery, through fasting and prayer to crucify an idol or lust. It were good ye had a holy jealousy over yourselves, that you are in 'the bond of iniquity, and gall of bitterness.' The most part of our mortification is rather by consent, than by constraint; our idols do rather go out, than are cast out; or else our idols die rather to us, than we do to them. Hence it is, that oftentimes after we have famished our gods, we sit down and bemoan ourselves over the graves of our idols; and as David lamented over Absalom, so do we over our lusts.

3. Did ye ever know, what it was to distinguish betwixt absence and presence? When did ye meet with such a place, which ye might call Peniel, that you have seen God face to face? And in another place, you might have said, "Here he did turn about the face of his throne, and did veil himself with a cloud," so that I know not where to find him.

4. I shall in the last place propose this question, which I conceive may not only convince profane atheists, but also some who have a shew of religion. Did you ever know what it was to sit down and lament over absence from Christ, and think it an insupportable want? O! where is the exercise of the grace of love now gone? O! but Christ may live long in heaven, before the most part of us give him a visit; I fear he will visit us, before we visit him.

And now, O atheists! examine yourselves by these, and be persuaded, that if ye know not what these things mean, ye are yet strangers unto the spiritual exercise of the duty of prayer, and all the prayers that ever ye have presented, have been but

‘as smoke in his nostrils, and a fire that burneth all the day.’ Believe me in this, O men of the world, that in the day when ye shall solemnly appear before God in the ‘valley of decision,’ this shall be a great *item* of your ditty, that ye have prayed so much, or rather that ye have profaned his holiness (which you pretend to love) so much. O that all of us were not ‘almost, but altogether persuaded to be Christians!’ Seeing Christ doth offer that precious dignity, to make us not only ‘sons-in-law to a King, which ought not to seem small in our eyes,’ but also to make us kings and priests unto God; can we refuse such an offer as this? Might not he summon the heavens and the earth, and angels, and our brethren, who are now above, to behold a wonder? Yea, and no doubt it is a wonder, that any of us should slight such an offer.

Now, if any of you would ask at me that question, What is and should be the native exercise of a Christian, while he is here below in the land of his exile, and a stranger from his Father’s house? Whether he should exercise himself in singing or praying? We answer, that prayer is, and should be the main exercise of a christian, while he is here below in the land of exile, and is a stranger from his Father’s house, and when the promises are not yet accomplished, nor all the prophecies fulfilled. We confess, the exercise of joy and rejoicing in God, ought to be a necessary duty and exercise of a Christian; we may sing the songs of those excellent musicians and heavenly harpers, ‘that stand upon the sea of glass, having harps in their hands.’ And our songs which are here below, are only different in degrees; their songs are of a higher key, and our songs are of a lower key; though we confess, they are more expert in that divine art, for we oftentimes spoil our songs in the singing of them: as likewise, they are more constant in that blessed exercise; but alas! we are oftentimes constrained to hang our harp on ‘the willow trees, while we sit by these rivers of Babel.’ But if we should praise more, we would pray more; and if we did pray more, we would praise more. O! but prayer would furnish us matter of new songs every day; and if we were much in that exercise, we might have that blessed Psalm to sing, ‘He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto the Lord.’ I think a Christian may examine himself by this unerring rule of his growth in grace, he may know it by the exercises of secret prayer: this is the pulse of a Christian, by which he may know his constitution; and the slow beatings of the pulse of the Christians of this generation, doth prove this unto us, that grace is in a remarkable decay; it is groaning with us, ‘as the groanings of a wounded man.’ O! but if we were more obedient unto this precious

command, 'Pray without ceasing,' our grace might be more vigorous, 'and our bed might be green,' and we might be 'bringing forth fruit in our old age.'

But now to that which we shall insist mainly upon in going through this duty and grace of prayer, (besides those things that we spoke of on last occasion) *viz.* What are these strong impediments and obstructions, that do impede and hinder a Christian's access unto God, in his secret retirements in prayer? If we were asked when did we last behold him! We may say that which Esther spake to the servants of Mordecai, 'It is thirty days since I did behold the king's face.'" But alas! our lot of lamentation and defection from God, may ascend to a higher pitch; yea, it is many thirty days since we did behold the King. O! but we are great strangers in heaven, and though we should be eternally so, we could not debate with his justice.

The first impediment that obstructs a Christian's liberty in having access unto God in his secret devotions, in that woful and carnal design, which he doth propose to himself in the exercise of that duty; we are low in our designs, which makes us low in our enjoyments. This is clear, James iv. 3. where there is given as a reason, why we do not receive that which we pray for, 'We ask amiss, to spend it upon our lusts.' We pray in secret, that we may be more fitted to pray when we go abroad, and thereby get applause: hence it is, that so much of Christians pursuits are rather taken up in seeking after the ornaments of prayer, than after the grace of prayer; rather to pursue after these things that adorn it, than those things that are saving in it; and oftentimes the ministers of the gospel have that woful end proposed to themselves. How oftentimes do our hearts speak that which Saul said to Samuel, 'Honour me this day before the people and elders of Israel?' And I think Christians may easily discern, whether or not they propose this to themselves as the last and ultimate end of their devotions? And one who hath these woful qualifications, doth resent and grieve more for his public straitenings and bonds, than for those which he hath in private. Are there not many of us here, who will rise up from secret prayer, under the undeniable conviction of much distance from God, and yet never know what it is to have an anxious thought about it? O! when did absence from Christ in our secret retirements make us 'forget to eat our bread? Oh! that sickness of love, where is it gone? We are seek unto death of imaginary health, and we wish that the sickness of love were more epidemical and universal in those days, which were not a sickness unto death, 'but for the glory of God.' And in our public straitenings, when we converse one with another, how much do we grieve and re-

pine? Though, we confess, these are rather the grievings of pride, than of love, rather lamentation, because of the loss of our redemption than because of the loss of our absence from Christ? Those who hath this woful qualification, of proposing this to themselves as the end of their devotions, may likewise know it by this, that when they are straitened in their public approaches to God, and others are enlarged, they then envy and fret, and are rather endued with envy, than holy emulation; which proveth to us, that we are not great in the kingdom of heaven, because we are not much concerned how to glorify God, which hath given such gifts to men; but we sit down on his wise and wonderful dispensation, 'Though he hath given to others five talents, and to us but one;' so that oftentimes we are provoked to that impious course, as 'to bind up our talent in a napkin, and to dig it in the earth, and to hide our Lord's money.' Studying by that practice, to appropriate the estimation of humility unto ourselves, when we cannot get the estimation of one that is eminent in parts and abilities, which doth oftentimes provoke God to take that from us, which we seem to have, 'and to give it to him that hath more, so that he may have abundance.' One who proposeth this woful end in himself, as the end of his devotions, may likewise know it by this, that seldom or never doth he go about the exercise of prayer from a principle of love or delight to walk with God, but to attain the expressions of prayer: hence it is, when the most of Christians come abroad, they rather prove themselves orators, than Christians; the voice of words is more heard, than the voice of affections, and these inexpressible sighs and groans of the spirit.

O! the real and spiritual exercise of that duty is far gone into decay, there is not one among a thousand that doth study earnestly after it. Think ye to pursue and win God by your fair blossoms and flourishing rhetoric, gallantness and fineness of expression? Will not he, who is infinite in understanding, laugh at your folly? Are ye to persuade a man? Are ye not rather to persuade God? Ye may likewise know by this, whether or not ye propose it to yourselves as the last and ultimate end of your devotions, and it is, when ye have most enlargements and access unto God, in your secret retirements, and ye desire and covet to have manifest spectators and auditors, that so they may pass that testimony upon you, 'That ye are men greatly beloved of God,' that doth receive such singular testimonies, of his love and of his respects; but woe be unto you that are such hypocrites, 'who covet the greetings of the markets, and uppermost rooms at feasts, desiring to be called of men, Rabbi:'

verily ye shall have your reward; then he that is first, shall be last, and he that is last, shall be first.' Then that proverb shall be taken up over you, 'How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning?' When Satan by his tail shall draw all stirring stars down out of heaven, towards the earth. And we think this woful evil of proposing ourselves as the end of our devotions, doth not only obstruct his grace, but likewise, when we attain to it in some measure, it breaks it off.

It is certain, that when a Christian hath most nearness with God, and is (in a manner) lifted up to the third heavens, then he doth receive great liberty of expressions, winning to some high and eminent conceptions of God, and some significant expressions of his own misery, then our pride causing us to reflect upon what we have spoken, do much quench our holy flame of zeal and love; we study to have expressions in our memory, that we may express them when we come abroad, rather than affections in the heart; and thus hath obstructed many Christians of precious enjoyments, and doth prove this eminently to you, that ye are more taken up in the expressions of your enjoyments than with the enjoyments themselves.

We confess there are some who are more rude and gross in their carriage, who go about this exercise of prayer, that they may take advantage to sin with more liberty and with fewer challenges; like that adulterous woman mentioned in Prov. vii. 14, 18. who after she had said, she had peace-offerings with her, and that she had paid her vows, she inferred this, 'That she would go and take her fill of loves, and solace herself till the morning.' Your prayers O atheists! are always an abomination in the sight of the Lord. O! how much more, when ye bring them with such a wicked mind? How will you hide your sins with such a covering? O! take heed to your spirits, lest ye deal treacherously with God; there are many of us that pray like saints, but we walk like devils; surely one that heard us pray might prophesy good things of us, but in our life may find their prophecies fail in the accomplishment.

There is a *second* impediment that doth obstruct a Christian's liberty in the exercise of prayer, in his secret retirements, which is that woful formality and indifferency of spirit that we use in the exercise of our secret prayers; the most part of us are ignorant, what it is to 'cry mightily to God, when we are alone, and to wrestle with him, were it until the dawning of the day, till he bless us, that so we may indeed be princes with God;' that by these two hands we may lay hold on him, faith and love; love lays hold on the heart of Christ, and faith lays hold on his word, and by it detains him in the galleries. I may speak this to

the shame of many of you, that it were to your advantage to be as serious in speaking unto God when you are alone, as ye are serious when ye are in company. A heathen observed this, and therefore pressed it upon all to whom he wrote, that they should beware of woful indifferency. And we confess that this woful indifferency of ours, is but an involving ourselves in that curse, 'Cursed be the man that hath in his flock a male, and voweth and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing.' O what if precious Christ should propose that unanswerable challenge to many of us who are here, are the consolations of God small to you? Or is there any secret thing with you, that you do so little pursue after these things? We confess, our formality and woful indifferency, doth much proceed either from the want of a solid impression of a Diety before whom we pray, or else from the want of a spiritual conviction of the absolute necessity of the things that we pray for. Ye formalists, whose constant practice is to be formal, by your formality ye make your bonds stronger upon your spirits, and do wreath the yoke of your transgressions round about your necks. These impertinent roving of the spirit that we have in the exercise of prayer, doth, no doubt, come from this fountain of woful formality that we have in it; fowls do with liberty descend upon the carcasses, when we are formal, and it is only fervency that must drive away these.

The *third* impediment that obstructs a Christian's liberty is, we are not much taken up in employing of the Holy Ghost, that must help our infirmities, and must breathe upon our withered spirits, otherwise such dead bones as we are cannot live; "Our bodily exercise profiteth little, it is the Spirit that quickneth" as is clear, John iii. 8. And certainly, except "the north or south wind blow, our spirits cannot flow out; except the angel move the water, we cannot step in and be healed." O! but that word is a mystery to our practice, which is in the twentieth verse of the epistle of Jude; and surely we may be astonished when we read it over, and we may be ashamed that we are so little in the real practice of it, where this is put in amongst the midst of the Christian's duties, that we should pray 'in the Holy Ghost: and certainly, that duty is required of us, although it be a mystery, and an unknown thing to the practice of the most part of the Christians of this generation. I think, a Christian that is much in the employment of the Holy Ghost, when he goeth to pray, he is put to an holy *non plus*, so that he knoweth not what he shall say, and is oftentimes put without a compliment to propose that desire to God, 'Lord teach us what we shall say, for we cannot order our speech before thee, by reason of our darkness. Think ye not that Peter, James, and John, had the spirit of prayer

eminently above us all, and yet they were not ashamed to propose that desire to God, 'Lord, teach us to pray.' It were for our concernment and advantage to pray even as though we had never prayed before. I am persuaded of it, that if this exercise of prayer were so gone about, we should have much more liberty of words, and of expressions than we have. It is certain, we must have no confidence in our gifts and abilities of prayer. The prayers that are penned in heaven, are best heard in heaven. That which the Holy Ghost doth dictate, (with reverence be it spoken) the Father can best read. The Father can read no character of any person, (to admit it) but which his blessed hands do pen.

There is this *fourth* impediment and objection, which obstructs a Christian's liberty and access to God, in his secret retirements and prayers, that we are so little taken up in the employing of Jesus Christ, as a Mediator in our approaches unto God. I think, it is impossible for a Christian to delight and enjoy himself with God, but through Jesus Christ, who is that 'vision of peace.' O Christians! through what door will ye enter into the 'holiest of all, if ye enter not through him, even through Jesus Christ, the veil of his flesh? In a manner, he is the door of heaven, and we must enter into heaven through the door. Christ is that great Courtier in heaven, by whom we must have access and admission unto the King. If any person dare adventure to go to pray without him, ' (who is that blessed Days-man betwixt God and sinners)' he comes without his wedding-garment, and so that question shall be proposed to him, 'Friend, how camest thou hither? Or rather, 'O enemy, how camest thou hither without a wedding-garment?' And be persuaded of it, that ye shall remain speechless, not opening your mouth.

The *fifth* impediment and objection, which obstructs a Christian's liberty and access to God, in his secret retirements is, the woful intanglements and engagements of hearts that we have to impertinent vanities and trifles of this passing world; our hearts are mightily taken up with the perishing and decaying things that are in this life; yea, the most part of our hearts are married to the world, and to the things thereof; and we think, and are persuaded of it, that that doth exceedingly obstruct and mar our liberty and access unto God. This divinity was well known to godly David, Psalm lxvi. 18. 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear my prayer.' Hearing and access, although they be not much different, yet always the last presupposeth the first, and this divinity was also well known unto that blessed man, that is spoken of in John ix. 31. "And this we know, that God heareth not sinners; but if any man be a worshipper of God,

and obey his will, him he heareth." I think these woful and dreadful evils that doth so easily beset us, doth exceedingly hinder and obstruct us to ascend in a spiritual cloud of divine and holy affection unto God; the souls of the most parts of us, are divided amongst many, and even amongst so many lovers, that it cannot devote and resign itself unto God; every impertinent idol and lust, doth claim a right and relation unto the soul, and then that obstructs a Christian's liberty in his secret retirements. O! to be more in the exercise of this precious and excellent grace of faith, whereby we may purify ourselves from all 'uncleanness of the flesh and of the spirit, and may be able to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord.' O! can it be, that such a fountain, that such a defiled and corrupt fountain, that sends forth only salt water, can send forth any sweet, precious and soul-refreshing springs of living-water? This was a mystery, and a paradox unto the apostle James, chap. iii. 12. "Can the fig-tree bear olive-berries? Or can the olive-tree bear figs? So can no fountain yield salt water and fresh. And certainly, it shall always remain impossible for us to do both good and evil. Would ye know the livery which the church of Christ must have, and her members? It is to be clothed with holiness. For, no doubt, that is the robe and garment with which we must enter into the holiest of all: and may not that incite and provoke your desires to follow after it, which is so excellent and precious? Believe it, we are not able to tell the worth of it.

There is this *sixth* impediment, which obstructs a Christian's liberty and access unto God in his secret prayer, and it is that woful resisting and quenching of the motions of the Spirit, that oftentimes we fall into. Hence it is, that when a Christian doth go to God, he is debarred, and his prayer is shut out from God; and the reason of it is, because he debarred God before; and this is remarkably clear from the bride's practice, Cant. v. 2. compared with the following verses, she held Christ at the door, notwithstanding his 'locks were wet with the dew of the night, and his hair with the drops of the morning.' But when she had condescended to open to him, he had withdrawn himself from her. O! who would hold out such a precious guest? Surely it were a more suitable exercise for us, that we should admire and wonder, and stand astonished at his low condescension, that ever he should have condescended so low as to come unto us, rather than to requite that marvellous and unsearchable grace of his towards us, after such a way as many of us so sinfully do.

There is this *last* impediment, that hinders a Christian's liberty and access unto God, in his secret prayers, and it is that woful evil of pride, wherewith we are clothed so much in our

approaches to God; we ought 'to bow our heads seven times towards the ground,' when we begin to make our approaches unto him, even unto him, who is greater than all the kings of the earth. Believe it, if the grace of humility were more our exercise in secret prayer, certainly we should enjoy more of him than we do; this is clear in 2 Pet. v. 7. where he saith, 'God giveth grace to the humble; but he resisteth the proud.' And likewise clear from Isa. lvii. 17. though he be that high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, and whose name is holy, yet he saith, "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a humble and contrite spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." And though he be that high and lofty One, he loveth one that is of a pure and contrite spirit. O! might we not always say, 'That we are not worthy, that thou should even condescend so far, as to come under our roof? Modesty and reverence might make us admire such wonderful and precious visits; 'Whence is it,' saith Elizabeth, 'that the mother of my Lord should come to me?' much more may we say, "Whence is it, that the Lord himself should come to us?" We may challenge ourselves, that our enjoyments of God, are not more than they are.

Now we shall speak, *Secondly*, A little to you, (before we shut up our discourse) how a Christian may be helped after his enjoyments in prayer, (and after he had been admitted to taste of 'that pure river that flows out from beneath the throne of God) to rest in his love to Christ, and not to stir him up, nor awake him, before he please.' We confess, it is as much difficulty (if not more) to maintain communion with God, when it is gained, as to gain it when it is lost. O! but Satan hath oftentimes caught much advantage over the people of God, after their enlargements. When was it that John fell down to worship the angel, was it not when he had 'seen the bride the Lamb's wife, adorned?' as is clear, Rev. xix. 16. compared with the preceding verses: and it is clear again from John's practice, Rev. xx. 9. compared with the foregoing words. And when was it that the disciples did rove, not knowing what they spake, was it not when they were on mount Tabor, and did see the fashion of his face change before them? Matth. xvii. 2, 4, 6. Though we confess, we must give an indulgence unto that, it was nothing but the ravings of holy love that made them to do so; which alas! is not much heard in these days; we rove in a more impertinent manner. And we think, a Christian after his enjoyments and enlargements, ought especially to stand on his watch, and to 'pray lest he enter into temptation;' for the stroke he doth receive after enjoyments and enlargements, is one of the most

discouraging strokes, and most anxious, that he meeteth with: it hath been the occasion of much unbelief, and hath made his own to mourn, not only over the foundation, but also even to raze it down; arguing thus with themselves: if that when Christ was present with them, upon whom their strength was laid, they were led captive unto their lusts, Rom. vii. 23. how much more shall they be led captive by them, when Christ shall be absent and away? They have been put to draw that conclusion, 'One day I shall fall by the hand of some of mine enemies.' We should guard against such a stroke, because it doth always almost make the Christian call in question the reality of his enjoyments. It is hard for a Christian to receive a stroke by the hand of his iniquities after enlargements, and not presently to call in question the reality of them; yea, more to call in question his estate in grace; for they do often debate with themselves "If it had been he who visited me, would he not have enabled me to sing a "new song of triumph over my lusts?" And also, ye would guard against it, because it is one of the most dishonourable indignities and affronts that can be put upon precious Christ; and if there were no more to provide you to guard against it, may it not be sufficient unto you, that that stroke which ye have received by your iniquities, after your enlargements and enjoyments of God, if it be by your own consent, (believe it, and be persuaded of it) that (in a manner) it saith this much unto you, that ye have preferred an idol and lust even to Jesus Christ? We think, the Jews preferring Barabbas before Christ, when the crown of thorns was upon his head, and when he was spitted upon and buffeted, is not such an indignity and disgrace as ye put upon him, when ye prefer your lusts und idols unto him, even when he is appearing with a crown of glory and Majesty unto you, and a robe of righteousness and of joy. O! dare ye even in his presence prefer any thing before him; might not angels, and the souls of just men made perfect, and all that are round about the throne, might they not all take up that lamentation over you, 'Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise?' And we think, there are these three woful evils, that readily befalls a Christian after enlargements and enjoyments that he meets with.

There is this *first* evil of security, Cant. v. 3. compared with the first verse, where Christ, when he was come into his garden, 'Had gathered his myrrh with his spices, and had eaten his honey-comb with his honey, and had drunken his wine with his milk;' and yet for all these enjoyments the spouse was sleeping; as likewise in Zech. iv. 1. compared with the preceding chap. where the prophet fell asleep after his enjoyments, 'until the an-

gel came and awaked him'. Oh! we readily sleep in the bed of love; and that hath impeded many excellent visits that we might have. O! what a visit was that of the spouse? Cant. v. We may question, whether ever she got such an one while she was here below.

And *secondly*, That woful evil of pride, as is certainly presupposed in 2 Cor. xii. 7. where, lest Paul should be exalted above measure, through the abundance of revelations, there is a messenger of Satan sent to buffer him. O! but it is a dangerous exercise for a Christian to search out his glory. We confess, we do not search to strengthen our confidence, or our love, but to add oil to that fire of pride, in our reflections upon ourselves; 'The wind doth lift us up upon its wings, and we ride upon it till our subsistence be dissolved.

And there is this *third* evil, which is not so obvious, but, no doubt doth oftentimes befall the Christian, and that is, self-love, which oftentimes he falleth unto after his enjoyments; and this evil doth certainly break off many of our enjoyments, to the disadvantage of the Christian, and hinders him to exercise himself in the grace of true love, which always we ought to be keeping in exercise, because, it is that oil by which our chariot-wheel must move swifter, and be as the chariots of Amminadab.

Now for that which we proposed, *viz.* How a Christian may be helped to keep his enjoyments, which he hath attained to by prayer. We shall only propose these two things. 1. Be much in the exercise of watchfulness after your enlargements, that ye enter not unto temptation. And 2. Be much in the exercise of humility, that when grace lifts you up, you may not lift up yourselves. O! but a Christian that walketh always with his feet towards the earth, and doth never mount an hand-breadth above it, he walketh most safely. I know nothing to keep your enjoyments in life, and to keep you from soaring in your enjoyments so much, as the grace of humility: but we need not insist long in telling you, how ye shall maintain your enjoyments; there are, alas! so few of them in these days; when were ye in heaven? Or when was heaven brought down to you in a manner? If the most part of us did now behold Christ, we would not know him, it is so long since we saw him. O precious Christ how much is he undervalued in these days? I think, if such a supposition as this were possible, that if Christ would go down to the pit of those damned persons that are reserved in everlasting chains, and preach that doctrine unto them, "Here am I, receive me, and ye shall obtain life;" we question whether obedience or admiration would be most their exercise: would they not bind that command as a chain of gold about their necks?

But know it, ye that refuse him now, ere long he shall refuse you. O when shall that precious promise that is in Zech. viii. 21. be accomplished, "And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and seek the Lord of hosts; I will go also?" Or as the word may be rendered, continually. O! when shall such a voice be heard in the city of Glasgow? Seeing our brethren above sing without ceasing, let us 'pray without ceasing.' And to you that pray, I shall say this word, ye that fervently pray without ceasing, it is not long before ye shall sing without ceasing, and without all interruption.

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### SERMON III.

1 THESS. v. 17. *Pray without ceasing.*

REAL godliness is so entire and undivided, and the parts of it are so inseparably knit, and linked one with another, and cannot be parted, that it is like Christ's coat that was without seam, that it could not be divided; and except the whole fall to us by divine lot, we can have no part nor portion in it. And were this more solidly believed, and imprinted up on our hearts, the inseperable connection and near cognation that is amongst all the graces of the Spirit, we should not be so partial and divided in our pursuits after them, 'seperating these things which he hath joined together,' which oftentimes is the occasion that our nakedness and deformity doth appear; neither should we (if this were believed) be so soon satisfied with our attainments, (but in a manner) should be entertaining an holy oblivion and forgetfulness of all that we have purchased, to put by our hand, and should be "passing forward to those things that are before, till once we attain to that stature of one in Christ." And till grace have its perfect work, and want nothing, we can never be constant. Amongst all the graces of the Spirit, which a Christian ought vigorously to pursue after, this grace of prayer is not amongst the least: it is that which keepeth all the graces of a Christian in life and vigour, 'and maketh us fat and flourishing, and bringeth forth fruit in our old age: and except the Christian be planted by that wall, his branches will never climb over the wall; who is the Christian that groweth like 'a palm tree, and doth flourish as the cedar in Lebanon?' It is he that is planted in the house of the Lord, which is a house of prayer. And we conceive, that the fundamental cause why grace and the real exercise of godliness is under such a woful and remarka-

ble decay in these days, it is want of obedience unto this great commandment, 'Pray without ceasing. Were we dwelling forty days in the mount with God, our faces should shine, and we should be constrained to cast a veil over them.' Were we entertaining a holy and divine correspondence with heaven by this messenger of prayer, we might be tasting of the first-fruits of that land afar off. Prayer is one of these faithful messengers and spies which a Christian sends forth to view the promised land, and which always doth bring up a good report upon that excellent and glorious land. O! when went ye to the brook Eshcol by the exercise of prayer, and did cut down a branch with a cluster of grapes, and were admitted to behold that land, which is the glory of all lands, in the midst of which doth grow that tree of life, which bears twelve manner of fruits every year?' O! what a land suppose you it to be, wherein are twelve harvests every year? Alas! we are straitened in our desires, which makes us straitened in our enjoyments. May we not blush and be ashamed, that the men of the world should enlarge their desires as hell, and as death, and shall cry, *Give, give*, after these passing and transient vanities of the world; and that Christians should not be provoked to enlarge their desires as heaven, and as the *sand by the sea-shore*, after these things that are most high and divine in their nature, and are most fruitful and advantageous in their enjoyments? We think ignorance is the cause of our slow pursuit after these things; and ignorance in men of the world, is the occasion of their swift and vigorous pursuit after these endless and passing vanities of this vain and transient world.

We did at the last occasion (speaking upon these words) speak somewhat to that which doth obstruct a Christian's liberty in his secret retirements and conversing with God, so that the door of access is oftentimes shut upon him, and he hath not the dignity conferred upon him to enter into the *holiest of all*.

We spake likewise to that which was the best and most compendious way to maintain fellowship and communion with God, after once it is attained, that when our hearts are enlarged, we may keep our spirit in a tender and spiritual frame; we shall now, in the next place, speak a little to you, how a Christian may be helped to know the reality of his enjoyments, whether they be delusions, yea, or not; or tokens and significations of the Lord's special and singular respect; and before we speak of that, we shall premise these two things:

*First*, That a man which hath but a common work of the Spirit, and hath never been endued with real and saving grace, he may attain to many flashes of the Spirit, and some tastings 'of the power of the world to come:' as likewise, to the receiving of

the word of the gospel with joy; as is clear from Heb. vi. 5. and Matth. xiii. 20. He may have many things that looks like to most heavenly and spiritual enjoyments of a Christian: but we conceive, that the enjoyments of these that have but a common work of the Spirit, they are not of such a measure and degree as the enjoyments of the sincere Christian: hence they are called, in Heb. vi. 5. but a tasting; the word is sometimes used for such a tasting, as when one goeth to the merchant to buy liquor, he doth receive somewhat to taste, to teach him to buy: but that is far from the word which is in Psalm xxxvi. 8. 'They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the rivers of thy pleasures.' And from that word which is in Cant. v. 1. 'Eat and drink abundantly, O beloved.' We conceive likewise, that their enlargements and enjoyments which they have, the strength and vigour of their corruptions are not much abated thereby; neither is conformity with God attained; hence is that word, Matth. xiii. 20. Though they receive the word with joy, yet the thorns, (which we do understand to be corruptions) they do grow without any opposition; and they that never knew what it was to have the strength and vigour of their lusts abated by their enjoyments, they have but a common work of the Spirit. The hypocrites enlargements are rather in public, and in their conversings one with another, than in their secret retirements; and those enjoyments that they have when they converse one with another, they do rather joy and rejoice, because of applause that they have by such enlargements, and of a reputation of having familiarity and intimateness with God, rather than for the enjoyments themselves; and that dignity and honour hath been conferred upon them to taste some of that river that flows from beneath the throne of God. We conceive likewise, that in all their enjoyments that they have, they do not much study and endeavour to guard against all obstructions and impediments that may stir up Christ, and awake him before he please; they can give their hearts a latitude to rove abroad after impertinent vanities; yea, presently after the seeming access and communion with God; as likewise, their desires to the duty of prayer, Christian duties is not much increased by their enlargements which they receive, being strangers, as in that word which is in Prov. x. 23. 'The way of the Lord is strength to the upright,' &c.

That which, *Secondly*, We shall speak of, (before we come to speak how a Christian may be helped to know the reality of his enjoyments), is this, that there is an enjoyment of gifts, which is far from the enlargement of the Spirit of grace. There may be much liberty of words, and of expressions, where there

is not much liberty of affection. We think, that it is a frequent delusion amongst his own, that they conceive their liberty of their expressions of themselves in prayer, is enlargement, but we are persuaded of this, that there may be much of this, and not much of the spirit of the grace of prayer. (As we told you before), The spirit of prayer is sometimes an impediment to words; so that a Christian which hath much of that, may have least of volubility and of expression.

But, *First*, These enjoyments that are real, which indeed are significations of his love and respect to you, they do exceedingly move and humble the Christian, and cause him to walk low in his own estimation. Hence is that word, 2 Sam. vii 18, 19. where David being under such a load of love, that (in a manner) he is forced to sit down and cannot stand, he doth subjoin that expression, ‘Who am I, O Lord, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?’ And also in Job xiii. 5, 6. where that enjoyment which Job had of God, ‘as to see him with the seeing of the eye,’ (a sight not so frequent in those days) he subjoins a strange inference from so divine promises, ‘therefore I abhor myself in dust and ashes.’ And in Isa. vi. 5. compared with the preceding verses, where Isaiah from that clear discovery of God, as to see him in his temple, he is constrained to cry out, ‘Wo is me, I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips.’ It were our advantage, that when we are lifted up to the third heavens, were it to hear words that are unspeakable, yet to cover our upper lip, and cry, *unclean, unclean*; we ought always to sit near the dust, the more that grace exalts us to heaven. And we conceive, that it is a most excellent way to keep ourselves in life after our enjoyments, to be walking humbly with God, and to know that the root beareth us, and not we the root. Christian enlargements that are real have this effect upon them, it doth provoke to a more constant exercise in pursuing after God; their diligence is enlarged, when they are enlarged; hence is that word, Psalm cxvi. 2. ‘Because God hath inclined his heart unto me, (which presupposeth access) ‘therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.’ It is certain, that if our enjoyments be real, they will be well improven, for this is a sweet fruit which doth always accompany them.

2. Ye may likewise know the reality of your enjoyments, by your endeavours to remove all impediments and obstructions that may interrupt your fellowship and correspondence with God, according to that word, Cant. iii. 5. when after the church did behold him who had been so long absent, she is put to this, ‘I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my beloved,

till he please.' I conceive, this is one of the most certain demonstrations of the reality of enjoyments, when ye are put to more carefulness and solicitude, to have all things taken out of the way that may provoke him to go away, and quench his Holy Spirit. O! but it is a marvellous undervaluing of the grace of Jesus Christ, to take such a latitude to ourselves after we have been enlarged.

3. Ye may likewise know the reality of your enjoyments by this, when ye do attain conformity with God by your enjoyments: hence is that word, 2 Cor. iii. 18. 'Beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.' Our corruption must be abated, if we would prove the reality of our enjoyments: for if we give them that complete latitude which they have had before, we have reason to be suspicious and jealous over ourselves: and we shall say this, do not rest upon all your enjoyments that you have here within time as satisfactory, but let them rather provoke your appetite, than suffice your desires and longings. That holy man David knew of no beginning of satisfaction, when eternity shall come, according to that word, Psalm xvii. 15. 'When I awake, (that is in the blessed morning of the resurrection) then shall I be satisfied with thy likeness.' Did David never find satisfaction here below? All that he did receive was but the streams that did flow from the immense and profound fountain and sea of love. He did drink out of the brook, while he was here below; but when he was above, he was drowned in that immense sea of love, and there was abundantly satisfied. O let the streams lead you to the fountain and river! when you win there, ye may sit down and pen your songs of everlasting praise; these are but of 'the valley of Achor, which must be a door of hope,' none have more entire and full enjoyment of him.

That which *thirdly* we shall speak to, shall be those advantages which a Christian may have by the exercise of prayer; we may say this unto you, 'Come and see,' can best resolve the question: for those spiritual advantages which a Christian may have in the real and spiritual discharge of this duty, that they are better felt than told. It is impossible sometimes for a Christian to make language of these precious and excellent things that he meets with in sincere and serious prayer.

The *First* advantage, it doth keep all the graces of the Spirit eminently in exercise, it maketh them vigorous and green; it keeps the grace of love most lively; for one that is much in the exercise of prayer, he doth receive so many notable discoveries and manifestations of the sweetness and glory of God, and most

rich participations of that unspeakable delight which is to be found in him, that he is constrained to cry forth, 'Who could not love him who is the King of saints?' O! when met ye with such an enjoyment of God in prayer as this? Did ye conceive, that ye were clothed with an impossibility to love him too much, or to love him as he ought to be loved? And when did you conceive, that it was an absurd opinion that he could be loved too much? Hence these two are conjoined together, 'Rejoice evermore,' and 'Pray without ceasing.' And what is joy, but a fruit of love, or rather an immense measure of love? We confess, it is a question that is difficult to determine, whether prayer or faith doth keep up love most in the exercise? We think love (whose foundation is upon sense) is most kept in exercise by prayer. Hence it is, when we are straitened in the exercise of that duty; and when he turns 'about the face of his throne,' then love begins to languish and decay, and then that excellent grace of faith doth step in, and speak this to love, 'Wait on God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.' Faith can read love in his heart, when sense cannot read love in his hands, nor in his face; but when he seemeth to frown, or to strike, faith can make such a noble exposition on such a dispensation. 'I know the thoughts of his heart, they are thoughts of peace and not of war, to give me an expected end.'

Prayer doth likewise keep the grace of mortification eminently in exercise: would ye know what is the reason that our corruptions do sing so many songs of triumph over us, and we are so much led captive by them according to their will? Is it not the want of the exercise of secret prayer, and that we are not much taken up in the employing of the angel, that must bind the old serpent the devil, as is mentioned, Rev. xx. 1. that hath the great chain in his hand? Hence Paul, when his corruptions were awakened and stirring within him, he knew no weapon so suitable for him as prayer; as is clear from 2 Cor. xii. 7, 8. Where the messenger of Satan was sent to buffet him, it is said, 'That he besought the Lord thrice that this might depart from him.' And our blessed Lord Jesus (speaking of the casting out of a devil) he saith, Matth. xvii. 21. 'This kind goes not out but by fasting and prayer.' It is no wonder that oftentimes we are led captive by our own iniquities and lusts, and corruptions mocking at our profession, and scorning such weak and feeble builders as we are, say to us, can such feeble Jews as these are build such a stately and glorious building in one day? But ye who are much in the exercise of this duty, and who, to your own apprehensions, do not receive much victory over your lusts, which maketh you oftentimes cry forth, "It is in vain for me to seek

“the Almighty, and what profit is there that I pray unto him?” We confess, the small success that a Christian hath, when he doth discharge the duty of prayer, doth sometimes constrain him to draw that conclusion, (I will pray no more.) We think the small victory that ye obtain over your lusts, and the little increase in the work of mortification, may proceed from the want of that divine fervency, and holy fervour that ye ought to have in your proposing your desires unto God. ‘The effectual fervent prayer of the righteous availeth much,’ as James saith, chap. v. 26. If we want fervency in proposing our desires unto God, it is no wonder that we want success. Or likewise, it may proceed from our want of faith, our misbelief giving the return of our prayers, before we begin to pray, and saying this unto us, ‘Though we call, he will not answer:’ but as James saith, chap. v. 19. ‘The prayer of faith may save you who are sick,’ and may raise you up, ‘for whatsoever ye ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive it.’ And it doth oftentimes proceed from the love and great respect that God hath to you, desiring that your wounds may always be bleeding, so that you may always keep about his throne. Is it not known, that if our necessities were away, we should abridge and mince much of our secret devotions to God? In a manner, necessity is that chain whereby God binds the feet of his own to his throne: he desireth not that they should be away, and therefore they halt, so that they may rely on his strength to bear them.

Prayer doth likewise keep the grace of patience (under our most sad and crushing dispensations) eminently in exercise; would ye know the most compendious way to make you to possess your souls in patience under great troubles? then be much in the exercise of the grace of prayer: hence is that word, James v. 15. ‘If any man be afflicted, let him pray, &c.’ And what made Paul and Silas to sing in prison, and so patiently to endure the cross? was it not this, ‘That they were praying at midnight?’ Acts xvi. 25. Certainly one that hath attained to much divine submission, and holy enjoyments in the beginning of their cross, they have been much in the exercise of prayer. Did you never know (any of you) what such a thing as this meant, that going to complain of your anxiety to God, you have been constrained to forget them, and begin to bless and praise him, because he hath stopped the mouth of your complaints, and hath put a more divine and heavenly exercise in your hand? This the Psalmist did attain to, Psalm lxxxix. where the scope of the psalm will bear that he was going to complain of the misery of the church, and of himself; yet before ever he began to propone a complaint to God, he spent to the thirty-eighth verse in praising him. Some-

times Christians have been constrained to cry forth, 'It is better to be in the house of mourning, than in the house of mirth:' and to resolve not to fret, 'to be put in a hot fiery furnace, heated seven times more than ordinary,' if they have in the furnace 'one like the Son of God to walk with them.'

Prayer doth likewise keep the grace of faith eminently in exercise. O! but faith (which is one of the mysteries of godliness) doth much languish and decay in us through the want of prayer: it is impossible for a Christian to believe, except he be much in the exercise of prayer. We may maintain a vain hope and persuasion, but the spiritual exercise of faith cannot be kept in life without the holy exercise of prayer. Hence it is that prayer, when faith is beginning to decay, doth go to God and cry forth, 'Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.' And we conceive, there are these three grounds, and golden pillars of faith, on which it doth lean, which prayer doth oftentimes administer and give unto it. *First*, There is that golden fountain, 'The faithfulness of God,' which prayer doth abundantly make evident unto the Christian: hence when a Christian doth pray according to his promise, and doth receive a return of his prayer, he doth receive a demonstration of the faithfulness of God, which is a pillar on which faith doth lean. Prayer doth likewise give unto faith this *second* pillar, which is the evidence and demonstration of the goodness of God. O! but one that is much taken up in the exercise of the grace of prayer, what large and eminent discoveries of God doth he receive? He oftentimes disappoints their fears, and overcomes their hopes and expectations; he doth not regulate our enjoyments according to our desire, but he doth regulate them according to that divine and most blessed rule, his own good will and pleasure; and O! blessed are we in this, that it is so. And *thirdly*, Prayer doth likewise furnish to faith experience, which is a pillar on which faith must lean. That which maketh the Christian to have so small experience, is want of the serious and constant exercise of prayer. O! but when he frowneth, we might have many things to support ourselves, if we were much in the serious exercise of this duty of prayer. And truly if we had these three pillars, our prayers would not return empty.

Now, the *second* advantage, that a Christian doth reap by the exercise of prayer, is, he is admitted by this duty to most intimate and familiar correspondence with God: did ye ever know what it was to be told him who is invisible, in the exercise of this duty? Did ye ever know, what these large and heavenly communications of his love do mean? Prayer is that divine channel, through which that river of consolation (that maketh glad the city of God) doth run. When was it that Cornelius did see

a man standing in white apparel, was it not when he was praying? And when was it that Daniel did meet with the angel, was it not when he was in the exercise of prayer, and offering up his evening oblation to God? O for communion and fellowship with God! (which is so rare and singular in these days.) Were the sweetness of it believed, we should be more frequent and constant in the pursuit of it. I confess, and wonder that we are not put to debate oftentimes, whether there be such a thing as communion and fellowship with him, we do so little enjoy it? What happiness (O beloved of the Lord, if so I dare call you) have ye, which doth so much satisfy you, that when your eternal happiness is clearly holden forth before your face, yet you do so much undervalue it? Surely this persuasion cometh not from him who hath called you. I think, if angels, and the souls of just men now made perfect, (if I may so speak) if they were admitted to behold that wonderful undervaluing of communion and fellowship with God, that is amongst the Christians of this generation, O how might they stand and wonder at us? They would think it a paradox and mystery to behold any undervaluing of him, who can never be valued. Would we not blush and be ashamed, if he should embrace you, ye that have so much undervalued him? I know no sin that a Christian shall be so much ashamed of, when he shall behold that noble Plant of renown, as the low and undervaluing conceptions and apprehensions that he hath had of him. If in heaven there were a latitude for us to pray, we should pray that prayer, (when first our feet shall stand within the threshold of the door of our everlasting rest) "pardon us for our undervaluing of thee, O precious Christ."

The *third* advantage which a Christian hath in the exercise of prayer, is this, it is that duty by which we must attain to the accomplishment of the promises. Though God be most free in giving of the promises, yet he will be supplicated for the accomplishing of them; this is clear, Ezek. xxxvi. 47. where, in the preceding words, there is named and holden forth large and precious promises, yet he subjoineth, 'Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them, &c.' This is likewise clear, 2. Samuel vii. 27. where David receiving the promise, that his house should be established for ever, and that the Messiah should come out of his loins, according to the flesh, he maketh that sweet fruit of it, 'Therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee.' Is not this a mystery, to turn over your promises into prayers, and your prayers into songs of praises? It is no wonder that we oftentimes complain, 'That his word doth fail for evermore, because we are not much in the exercise of that duty, which must

bring the accomplishment of these things that he hath promised.

The *fourth* and *last* advantage that a Christian doth receive by the exercise of prayer, it is the most compendious and excellent way to resist temptations that assault us. We spake before of mortifying corruptions, when once they have seized upon us; and that is a notable way to mortify them by prayer; this is likewise an advantage, that when temptations begin to assault us, then we should go to our knees for relief. And I conceive, if a messenger of Satan were sent to buffet us, we might be constrained to 'to pray without ceasing.' Hence Jesus Christ, who knew what was the best and most effectual remedy to resist temptations, giveth this remedy of prayer, Matth. xxvi. 41. 'Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.'

Now we shall shut up our discourse, by speaking a little to the last thing we intended to speak of at this occasion, and it is, how a Christian may be helped to walk suitably as he ought, under his spiritual bonds and straits. We confess, it is one of the most hard difficult tasks in Christianity, for a person to walk with divine submission under his public bonds, that when God (in the depth of his unsearchable wisdom) hath thought fit to draw a vail over his face, to subscribe that truth, 'He hath done all things well.' We confess, God hath these precious designs in such a dispensation, as that he may first hide pride from our eyes, and that we may be taught to walk humbly with him. O! but if we were always enlarged in our public conversing one with another, how would we esteem of ourselves above measure, and begin to undervalue those persons that are not thus kindly dealt with by God? Hence it is, that he always mixeth our wine with our water; he knoweth that the pouring in of such precious liquor, these brittle vessels of ours could not contain it.

He hath this design likewise in such a dispensation, that we may be put to the sweet exercise of the grace of prayer: in a word, that we may be constant, and serious in that duty. We conceive, if some liberty of words and enlargements in public were granted, we would abridge and come short in our private devotions. It is the great scope and main drift of some, to seem great in the kingdom of heaven amongst men, though they be least in the estimation of Christ, 'who is that faithful and true witness.'

And there is this design likewise in such a dispensation, and it is, that we may be convinced of our folly, and of the atheism and pride of our hearts, that can rise up from secret prayer, and yet never have anxious thoughts about it; but in our public straits and bonds, O! how can we mourn and repine. And we confess, we think these repinings doth rather proceed from this,

that we think that gourd of worldly applause is now beginning to wither over us, and therefore we cry forth, 'It is better for us to die than to live;' than from this, want of the presence of Jesus Christ, in the participation of his sweetness, which we may most strongly convince you by this. Is it not sometimes so with you, that under your public bonds, when ye have been most remarkably straitened within yourselves; yet if your hearts have not conceived evil of you, but have testified their satisfaction, doth not your sorrow even decay, and there is no more repining thereat?

Now we think the best and most compendious way for a Christian to bear such a dispensation, (as to obtain to a divine submission to Christ in all things, and to leave our complaints upon ourselves) is this, we should study much the vanity of our popular applause, what an empty and transient a thing it is. I confess, I would wish no greater misery to any, than to seek, and to have it; we think it misery enough to have it; but certainly they walk safest and most secure that care not for it. Hence a heathen said well to this purpose, *Qui bene latet, bene vivit*; He that lurks well, lives well. I would likewise have you much taken up in the consideration, how ye have great disadvantage by your repinings and murmurings, which you have against his dispensations, in straitening you in public. O Christians! do not your repinings incapacitate and indispose you for the going about the exercise of secret prayer? Doth not your repinings, under your public bonds, make your bonds stronger upon your spirits? I confess a Christian may contract and draw on more fetters and bonds by one hour's repining against such dispensations, than he is able to shake off for many days: and when ye are repining against such dispensations, that ye have met with, doth not your lusts and corruptions stir and awake within you? Surely they then prevail, and we may say, *Nullo contradicente*, nothing in opposition against them to our apprehension.

We would also say this to you, that ye may attain to a divine and holy submission to such a dispensation as this, ye would be much in the consideration from what fountain your repinings and murmurings doth proceed, what is the rise and original of them, and from which they spring. Is it not rather from a principle of pride, than from a principle of love to, and delight in God? From a principle of self-estimation, rather than from a principle of longing for Jesus Christ, and sorrow for his withdrawing himself from you? (The evil of Diotrophes desiring the pre-eminence amongst the brethren) it is frequent amongst us: coveting to be, as one said, *Aut Cesar, aut nihil*; we desire either to be singular and matchless, or else to be nothing. We

confess, if a Christian did seriously ponder these things, and meditate upon them, certainly he might blush and be ashamed of his own folly: he might cover his face with confusion, and not dare to look up.

But, however, we would desire you, (even you) that in some reality and sincerity of heart have gone about this most precious and most blessed exercise of the grace of prayer, that ye may now begin to renew your diligence, ‘and to add to your diligence, faith; and to your faith, virtue;’ and to comfort yourselves with this, that there is an everlasting rest prepared for you in heaven above, which is not like the feast of Ahasuerus, ‘that lasted for an hundred fourscore and four days;’ but this blessed feast shall last throughout all the ages of long and endless eternity. Believe it, it shall be a blessed and everlasting feast, it shall be an everlasting feast of love. It shall be a feast that shall not be capable of any period nor end, nor yet shall know of any lothing. There is no satiety, neither any lothing in heaven. And O! may not this comfort you in your journey, and incite and provoke your desires to follow after him, who is altogether desirable, and altogether lovely, and ‘that bright and morning star.’

And likewise, I would say this to you, even to you who are atheists and strangers to this precious exercise of the duty of prayer: I think it were complete misery to you, if there were no more, but that ye are strangers to it, even to the exercise of this duty of prayer: for we think the exercise of godliness, it is a reward to itself, as we may say that word, *Pietas sibi præmium*. It is such an inconceivable and excellent a thing, that it is a reward to them whosoever have it; and, O! will not your hearts be prevailed with to fall in love with such a rare and excellent exercise, even with the exercise of godliness, which, we conceive, is *profitable for all things*? And O! will ye make it your study to pray to God, and to be in the exercise of godliness, without which ye shall never see God; without which ye shall never be admitted to behold him (the beholding of whom is the exercise of all the saints, and of all the souls of just men now made perfect, and of all those precious thousands that are now about this glorious throne), and without the exercise of which, these feet of yours shall never be admitted to stand within the blessed gates of that precious city, even the city of *the new Jerusalem, where all the redeemed of the Lord are*? and without the exercise of which, ye shall be eternally and undoubtedly undone, if ye want godliness, ye shall undergo the pains of hell, and the torments of the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; and the day is coming when that curse (that sad curse)

shall be sadly accomplished upon you, which is in Deut. xxviii. 34. 'Thou shalt be mad, for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt behold, and when the Lord shall smite thee with an evil that thou canst not be healed of, even from the sole of thy foot to the crown of thy head, and thou shalt become an astonishment, and a proverb unto all nations whithersoever the Lord shall carry thee, and thou shalt be smitten before thine enemies: thou shalt go out one way against them, and thou shalt flee seven ways before them: and thy carcase shall be meat unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field, and none shall fray them away; and all these things shall come upon thee till thou be destroyed.'

O atheists! what a terrible and dreadful sight shall it be, when ye shall behold those black and hideous everlasting chains, that shall once be wreathed about your cursed necks? O! to be thinking that ere long ye are to dwell and take up your everlasting prison, out of which there is no redemption again; and the door of the prison-house is sealed with the seal of the King, which is an unchangeable and unalterable decree. O! if the apprehensions and thoughts of this could once provoke and stir you up to pity your own precious and immortal souls, (with which there is no exchange). Oh! what a woful and marvellous stupidity and hardness of heart hath overtaken the people of this present generation, that go to hell with as much delight and ease, as if they were going to heaven? Oh! that your spirits were once awakened from your security, that ye might perceive the woful and miserable condition that ye are lying under. O Christian! what are ye resolved to do? Are ye not afraid that ye shall be benighted with your work? O! shall the sufferings of these pains first resolve you, and clear you of the sadness and inextricable sorrows that are in the bottomless pit? Now to him who is that blessed Master of assemblies, who can fix these words as nails in your hearts, and who can prove them therein, to his blessed and holy name we desire to give praise.

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#### SERMON IV.

1 THESS. v. 17. *Pray without ceasing.*

WE desire to commend the blessed and precious estate of those that are now exalted above the reach of this blessed exercise, and who have now made a blessed and precious exchange, that instead of 'praying without ceasing, they are now praising without ceasing.' And O! beloved of the Lord, (if so we may call

you) whither is that blessedness gone which you did speak of, *the enjoyment and fruition of Christ*; so that if he would have required it of you, 'you would have plucked out your right eyes, and given them to him?' O! is he become less precious, that your respects to him are so much impaired? Was it not once your divine and blessed lot, that ye could not have lived one day without the enjoyment of him, in whose face your eternal blessedness doth lie? O! but absence and estrangement from him is thought a dispensible want in these days; and that which is the ground of the expostulation, is, that ye are so little in giving obedience unto his blessed and precious command, 'Pray without ceasing.' Yea, if the stones and wall of this house, and if the rafters thereof could speak, they might utter this complaint upon many inhabitants of this city, *that they do not watch unto prayer*, and are not exercising themselves in the entertaining a divine and precious correspondence with heaven. Oh, whither is the exercise of that precious duty of prayer gone? O! how independent are we in our talk with God? O! when did you taste so much of his sweetness, that when ye did reflect upon it, ye were forced to say, 'did not our hearts burn within us while he spake with us?' When did ye cast an indissolvable knot of love upon your hands, which ye hoped eternity could not loose nor dissolve? I wonder that this is not a question which we do not more debate, how much undervaluers of communion and fellowship with God here below, (who can live many days without seeing the sun or stars, without beholding of him) can walk with such woful contentment? O! can such a delusion overtake you as this, that ye can reign as kings without Christ, and be rich and full without his fulness! It were, no doubt, the special advantage of a Christian, to be retiring from all things that are below; and to be inclosing himself in a sconce, in a blessed and divine contemplation of that invisible Majesty, and to have our souls united unto him by a threefold cord, which is not easily broken.

But now to come to the words, the next thing which we intend to speak to from this, is, to know what is the most compendious way to keep your souls in life, and to have them flourishing as a watered garden in the exercise of prayer, we shall say these four things unto you.

*First*, Be much in the exercise of the grace of fear when ye go to pray, that ye may have high and reverent apprehensions of that glorious and terrible Majesty before whom ye pray: there is a precious promise for this in Isa. lx. 5. 'Thou shalt fear and be enlarged,' &c. O! but our atheism (and our having that inscription engraven on all our duties, *worshipping an unknown*

God), maketh us to have so little access unto him, and taste so little of that sweetness, that causeth the lips of those that are asleep to speak. How oftentimes go ye to prayer, and are no more in the exercise of fear, than if ye were to speak to one that is below you? Those glorified spirits that are now about his throne, O! with what reverence and fear do they adore him? And if it be the practice of the higher house, why ought it not to be the practice of this lower house?

*Secondly.* If ye would attain to enlargement in the exercise of prayer, ye would be much in paying those vows that you have made to God when ye were enlarged. I am persuaded of this, that our making inquiry after vows, and our deferring to pay them, say in our practice, (before the angel) it was an error, it doth, no doubt, obstruct our access and liberty to God; these two are conjoined together, paying of vows and access to God, Job xxii. 27. 'Thou shalt make thy prayer unto him, and he shall hear thee, (which is access) and thou shalt pay thy vows.' Are there not many of us that decree many things without ourselves, that are not established by God? O! when shall our resolutions and our practice be of like equal extent?

There is a *third* thing we would give you as a compendious way to attain to the exercise of prayer, and enlargement in it, be much in the exercise of fervency, ah! when we go to prayer under bonds and straitenings, we take liberty to ourselves to abbreviate and cut short our prayers. O! do we not know what a blessed practice this is, to wrestle with God, were it until the dawning of the day, *and not to let him go till he bless us?* What was it that made way to Jacob's enlargement, was it not his seriousness and fervency? And these two are often conjoined in the Psalm, 'I cried and he heard me;' the one importing his fervency, and the other his access. Our prayers, for the most part, die before we win up to heaven, they proceed with so little zeal and fervency from us. This was the saying of a holy man, 'That he never went from God, without God, that ay where he left him, he knew where to find him again.' It is a saying that many of us doth not so much as endeavour to attain to, alas! we may say, that sin of neutrality and indifferency in prayer hath slain its ten thousands of enjoyments, when our sins (in prayer) hath but slain their thousands.

There is a *fourth* thing which we shall speak unto, as the most compendious way to attain enlargement in the exercise of prayer, and it is this, ye would be under a deep and divine impression of these things that ye are to speak of to God in the exercise of prayer, either to have your spirits under an impression of sorrow, or an impression of joy. In a manner, a Christian ought

to speak his prayer to his heart, before he spake it to God; and if we speak no more than what our hearts do indite, our prayer would not be long; and we should eschew these vain and needless repetitions that we use in the exercise of that duty of prayer. O! but we are exceeding rash with our mouths, and hasty with our spirits in uttering things before God. Almost we never go to prayer, but if we had so much grace to reflect upon it, we might be convinced of this, that we have uttered things that have not been fit to be uttered unto God; as when ye speak of your burdens and crosses, which you never did seriously premeditate upon; and likewise speak of these things, as your joy, in which ye did never rejoice. O! conceive ye him to be altogether such an one as yourself, that such a woful cursed practice and delusion as this should overtake you? If a Christian would study before he go to prayer, to imprint and engrave his desires and petitions upon his heart, he might have more liberty and access in the proposing of them unto God.

Now we shall shut up our discourse upon this noble grace and duty of prayer, with this, to speak a little unto the answers and returns of prayer.

And the *first* thing that we shall speak upon this subject, is, what can be the reason that the Christians in these days are so little expecting, and waiting for the return and answer of their prayers? For do we not oftentimes pray, and yet do not know what it is to wait for an answer and return to these prayers of ours? This exercise, which is so much undervalued by us, the want of it doth, no doubt, prove that marvellous decay that is in the work of a Christian's graces. And we conceive, that the little waiting for the return and answer to prayer, doth proceed from the want of the solid faith, and of the absolute necessity that we stand in of those things that we pray to God for; (for strong necessities make strong desires, and earnest expectations) but we may say, that our necessities die with our petitions: we should be more in waiting for, and expecting the returns of our prayers.

There is this likewise, that is the reason of that woful practice, we have not a lively and deep impression of the burden of these things which we would have removed by God: as when one is praying for the removing of some lusts, and some pregnant and predominant evil, and yet never cares whether it be removed or not, and the reason of this which makes us wait for, and expecting so little the answer and return of our prayers, is, because we are not groaning under the yoke and burden, as though it were unsupportable, but walking lightly under that yoke and heavy burden, and therefore we wait not for the an-

swers of our prayers: we look upon our chains and fetters of iniquities, as though they were chains of gold and fetters of silver: and so it is no wonder that we are not much in the expectation and waiting of our return of prayer, and to have these chains and fetters taken off us.

And there is this likewise, which is the occasion of our little waiting for an answer to our prayers, we have not a right apprehension and uptaking of the preciousness and excellencies of those things that we seek from God: we do not know and understand what advantage should flow to us from the having of these things that we seek, and what marvellous disadvantage shall flow to us from the want of them. O! but the people of this present generation, wherein we now live, have put a low rate upon the things of religion, which are of everlasting and soul-concernment; even those things that were accounted most precious and excellent by all those that have gone before us, and have taken up their possessions and eternal abode in that blessed land which is above. There is one thing which we undervalue and set at nought, and that is, our communion and fellowship with God. We are indifferent in having of it, and care not whether we have it or not, which maketh us not earnestly to press after the pursuing of it. O Christians! be persuaded of it, that there are these three disadvantages that follow unto a Christian that is not much in waiting for the answer and return of his prayer after he hath prayed.

The *first* disadvantage is this, it is a compendious way to win to formality in the duty of prayer. I will not say, that one which doth not always wait for an answer to his prayer, that he cannot pray in the Spirit, and in sincerity and fervency; but I need not be afraid to say this, that he who is not so much in the exercise of waiting for a return and answer to his prayer, he prays little to purpose: and it may be demonstrated, and clearly shown by this reason: Can ye be serious in the accomplishing of the means, if ye do not propose some end and design before your eyes why ye do so? Now, what is the end and scope that ye propose before yourselves in your going about the exercise of that duty of prayer? I confess, we ought to go about it, not only as a help and mean to remove our evil, and to obtain our advantages, but likewise we ought to go about it as a duty incumbent on us: but if we go not about the duty of prayer under both these considerations, and except we wait for the return and answer, certainly we pray not aright.

There is a *second* disadvantage, which a Christian hath that doth not wait for the answer and return of his prayer, and it is, he loseth many sweet experiences of the love and good will of

God towards him. It is no wonder that many of us do not receive much from God, the reason of it is, because we are not expecting and waiting for much from him. I will not say, but a Christian, that is not much in the exercise of waiting, may sometimes obtain the answer and return of his prayers; but we may say these things to such persons, if your prayers be answered, and ye have not waited for the return and answer of them, surely ye lose much sweetness and preciousness of the answer of your prayers. There is this likewise which we would say to such persons as these, if a Christian's prayer be answered, when he doth not wait for the answer of it, then the Christian cannot so resolutely build his faith upon such an experience, to believe that God again will answer his prayers, as if he had been waiting upon a return.

There is this *third* disadvantage that follows a Christian who is not much in the exercise of waiting for the return and answer to his prayer, and it is, he cannot continue long in a praying frame. I conceive that the most fit and compendious way for a Christian to keep his spirit in a holy and divine correspondence with God, is to have it in a holy and fit capacity to converse with God; this is a way to be much in the exercise of waiting for the return and answer of prayer. It is a sweet exercise to be expecting and waiting *till the vision shall speak* to you.

Now, are there not many here, who, if they were posed with this question, when were ye put to the serious exercise of waiting for the return and answer of your prayers, after ye have prayed? I am persuaded of it, ye should find it a difficulty to fall upon the number of the days wherein ye were taken up in this exercise. I think, that which doth so plainly demonstrate that woful formality and dreadful indifferency that is amongst us, (in going about the exercise of this duty of prayer) is this, we do not wait for the answers and returns of our prayers from God. O Christians! are ye so perfectly complete? Or have ye already attained to the full stature of one in Christ, that ye do not wait for the answers and returns of your prayers, that so ye may receive more from God?

And I would say this to these atheists and strangers to God, who never knew what it was to wait for an answer and a return to their prayers; and are there not many such here, who, if their consciences were now posed, when they did wait for a return to their prayers, they might (if they speak the truth) say, that they did never wait for an answer to their prayers? I say to such, that they did never pray aright.

Now the *second* thing which we shall speak upon the returns and answers of prayer is, how a Christian may come to the dis-

inct knowledge of this, that his prayers are heard and answered. A thing indeed, we confess, that many of us are not much taken up with, we not being in the exercise to know such a thing.

And *first*, There is a difference betwixt the hearing of prayer and of getting a return and answer to prayer; God, in the depth of his unsearchable wisdom, may sometimes hear our prayers, and yet make a long time to intervene before he give the sensible return and answer of that prayer; this is clear from Dan. x. 12. 13. where it is said of Daniel, 'That from the first day that he afflicted his soul, his prayers and supplications were heard;' and yet it is one and twenty days before the answer and return of his prayers did come. These are two distinct mercies to the Christian, the hearing of his prayer, and receiving the answer and return of his prayer, which he hath prayed for; and it is clear from Psalm xxxiv. 6. 'This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.'

We shall say this, *secondly*, That there is a great and vast difference betwixt the returns of prayer, and the delays of the returns of it; and yet it were a bad inference to infer, that God doth deny to give us the answer of our prayers, though he delay them a while; or to say, that we can have no answer at all; though we confess, that is the common place from which Christians do bring all their arguments to prove that their prayers are not heard, even the delay of the answer and return of their prayers: and this is clear from Rev. vi. 10, 11. where the souls of those that are crying to God for revenge of their blood upon the earth, their prayer is heard; and yet withal they are desired to stay a little, until their brethren (that are to be slain) shall be fulfilled, and then their prayers shall be fulfilled; and accomplished unto them.

There is this, *thirdly*, That we shall speak to, and it is this, that sometimes our prayers may be both heard and answered, and yet we shall not believe that it is so, when we are waiting for the distinct and solid apprehension of this mercy: and we conceive that this is rather occasioned through the greatness of affliction upon a Christian, and the continuance of his stroke; as is evidently clear from Job ix. 16, 17. where Job saith, 'If I had called, and he had answered me; yet would I not believe that he had hearkened to my voice.' And he gives this to be the reason of it, 'For he breaketh me with a tempest, and multiplieth my wounds without cause.' Or this may be the reason of it likewise, Why? when our prayers are both heard and answered, we believe not that it is so; and it is this, because of the want of the exercise of waiting for an answer, and that we are not much taken

up in expecting a return from God to our prayers; therefore when our prayers are heard and answered, we cannot believe that it is so.

There is this *fourth* thing which we will speak to concerning the returns of prayer, that the prayers and petitions of a Christian, even while he is under the exercise of misbelief, they may be heard and taken off his hand; as is clear from Psalm cxvi. 11, 12. 'I said in my haste, all men are liars;' but there is a sweet and precious experience which followeth that, 'What shall I render to the Lord, for all his benefits towards me?' And this is clear from Jonah, Jon. ii. 4. compared with verse 7. where he saith, 'I am cast out of thy sight,' and yet in verse 7. 'When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came in unto thee into thy holy temple.'

Now, to give some answer to the question which we proposed, how one may know whether or not his prayers be answered? *first*, If a Christian be enlarged and enabled to go on in duty, though he do not receive a sensible manifestation of the grace and acceptance of his prayer, but (in a manner) he is denied the answer and return of it, yet if he do attain to such a length as to *pray without ceasing*, and to have strength to accomplish this duty of prayer, that is (no doubt) a clear token and evidence that our prayers and supplications are heard by God, and in his own appointed time these prayers of yours shall be answered; and this is clear in Psalm cxxx. 2. where David giveth this as a token and evidence that his prayers were heard and answered, 'in the day when I cried, thou answeredst me.' And what is the argument that he bringeth to prove this, that his prayer was answered? It is this, 'And strengthenest me with strength in my soul.' Certainly it is a bad sign, and an evil token, that your prayers are not heard: if, because he denieth your suit and petition for a time, ye leave off the exercise of the duty of prayer, and faint in the day of your adversity.

There is a *second* thing by which ye may know, whether or not your prayers have met with a return and answer from God, and it is this, if your prayers be suitable unto his own word, and agreeable unto his holy and most divine will and pleasure, then ye may be persuaded of this, that God heard your prayers; that is abundantly clear from 1 John iii. 14. 'And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us.' Certainly it is difficult and exceeding hard, we confess, for a Christian to exercise faith upon the sure word of prayer, abstracting from all other grounds. But if we would have our faith elevated and raised to so divine a pitch, we would believe this precious truth, 'That whatsoever we ask

according to his will, he heareth us;’ and that he will answer our supplications, therefore will we wait patiently and faithfully upon God.

There is this *third* thing whereby you may know whether or not your prayers be heard, and it is this, if ye have delight and spiritual joy in the exercise of this blessed duty of prayer, though ye have not the return and answer of your prayers, yet it is an evidence and token that your prayers are heard, and you shall shortly have an answer given to them; and when ye lose your delight in duties, which ye once attained to, then ye may be afraid. There is somewhat of this hinted at in Job xxvii. 9, 10, where Job gives this as a reason and ground, that he will not hear the prayer and supplication of the hypocrite, ‘because he delighteth not himself in the Almighty;’ inferring this much, that if he would delight himself in God, then he would hear his prayer, and give him a return and answer to it.

There is a *fourth* thing whereby you may know whether or not your prayers are heard and answered, and it is this, when your sadness and anxiety (about that which ye were asking from God in prayer) is removed and taken away; this is clear from 2 Sam. i. 18. where this is given as an evidence, that Hannah was heard in her prayer and supplication, ‘because her countenance was no more sad.’ And certainly, when our prayers have such a return, then we may know distinctly, that they are answered by the Lord.

And the *fifth* thing that we would propose to you, whereby you may know whether or not your prayers have met with a return and answer from God is, if ye pray, making use of Jesus Christ, as a blessed days-man, to interpose himself betwixt the Father and you; then ye may be persuaded of this, that your prayers are heard: this is clear, where it is twice repeated, John xiv. 13, 14. ‘Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, ye shall receive it.’ Believe it, he can deny you nothing that you seek from him, if you ask it in faith.

Now that which, *thirdly*, We shall speak to upon the return of prayer, is this, to these things which doth obstruct the hearing of our prayers, why they are not answered by him; so that oftentimes, when we pray to him, ‘he shutteth out our prayer from him, and covereth himself with a cloud, so that our prayers cannot pass through.’ O! but if that duty and precious counsel which Hezekiah gave to Isaiah, Isa. xxxvii. 4. which truly is worthy to be engraven on our hearts, ‘Lift up thy prayer, &c. which doth import, that it was a weighty thing, which would require much seriousness in the going about it. I say, if that worthy counsel were obeyed, we should not have need to pro-

pose these obstructions, and to complain of God's ways. Now we shall speak to these obstructions which hinder us.

*First*, Hypocrisy which we have in the exercise of prayer: O! but we pray much with our judgment, when we pray not much with our affections; that is, our light will cry out, crucify such a lust; and our affections will cry out again, hold thy hand. It is a difficulty to have the spirit of a Christian brought such a length, as to have his judgment and affections of a like measure and extent; Job giveth this as a reason why God will not hear a hypocrite's prayer, Job xxvii. O! even because he is not constant: there is a woful disagreement betwixt what we speak, and what we think; we speak many things with our mouth, which our hearts sometimes witness that we would not have God granting us: (in a manner) our affections are a protestation against the return of many of our prayers: our idols are so fixed in our hearts, that we spare Agag the king of our lusts, though there be given out a commandment from the Lord to destroy all these: and it may oftentimes speak that the bitterness of death is past out against us, seeing we do oftentimes spare them contrary to his blessed command.

There is a *second* thing which obstructs the exercise of prayer, and it is, that woful and cursed end that we propose to ourselves in going about that duty; this is clear in James iv. 3. 'Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.' O! that woful idolatry that Christians do entertain in the exercise of prayer. That glorious and inconceivable attribute of God, of being *Alpha* and *Omega*, which we do sacrilegiously attribute to ourselves, in making ourselves the beginning of our prayers, and the end of them also: it hinders much our return of prayer. Certainly those woful ends that we spake of in the beginning of our discourse, (and all along in it) doth, no doubt, marvellously obstruct the answers of our prayers.

Now the *last* thing that we shall speak upon the return of prayer, shall be to some advantages which a Christian may have from this, that his prayers are answered, and that he hath received a return from the Lord. Believe me, there is more love in the answer of one prayer, than eternity could make a commentary upon: O! what love is in this, that he should condescend to hear our prayers? That such a glorious and infinite Majesty should (in a manner) condescend to bow down his ear to take notice of these petty desires that we propose unto him? And there are these five advantages that a Christian may have from this.

*First*, It is an excellent way to keep the grace of love in ex-

ercise; this is clear in Psalm cxix. 1. 'I love the Lord, because he hath heard the voice of my supplications.' O! but love in some hath eminently taken fire, when they have reflected upon this, that their prayers are heard.

There is this *second* advantage that a Christian hath, from the return and answer of his prayer, it is an excellent motive and persuasion to make us constant and frequent in the exercise of prayer; this is clear in Psalm cxvi. 2. where he reflecteth upon the hearing of his voice, 'Therefore I will call upon him as long as I live.' I am persuaded of this, that our little exercise of prayer doth much proceed from this, that we wait not for a return of prayer; and therefore oftentimes it is, that we do not receive a return. Believe me, there is more joy and divine satisfaction to be found in the solid and spiritual convictions of this, that our prayers are heard, than we will have in the exercise of many prayers that we pray.

There is a *third* advantage that a Christian hath, from the return and answer of his prayer, it is an evident token from the Lord, that his prayer is accepted by him, when a Christian can read his reconciliation by the gracious return of his prayer, and that he is in a gracious estate and condition: and O! is not that a great advantage? We confess God may hear the prayers of the wicked for the mercies that are common; but the hearing of a real Christian's prayer, both in mercies common and spiritual, proveth that his person is accepted by God; we must be accepted of him through Jesus Christ, before that he can have pleasure in our sacrifice; and is not this a precious advantage, to read your adoption upon the returns and answers of your prayer from God? May not the Christian say, when he meets with such a return and answer of his prayer, 'Now I am persuaded, that I am begotten unto a lively hope, because he hath heard the voice of my supplication?' In a manner, it is a character wherein you may read your interest and infestment in that precious and most blessed inheritance that is above. O! if there were no more to provoke you to wait for the return and answer of your prayers nor this, it may be sufficient unto many of these debates and disputings that you have about your interest in Jesus Christ. And O! may not this argument provoke you to love him?

The *fourth* advantage, that comes to the Christian from the consideration of the return and answer of his prayer is, it is a compendious way to make us desist from the committing of iniquity: hence is that word in Psalm vi. 8. where, upon the consideration of the hearing of his prayer, he breaketh out in that saying, 'Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity; for the Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping.' In a manner

speaking so much, that he would have nothing to do with such ones as they were.

*Lastly*, The return and answer of prayer, is an excellent way to keep our faith in exercise, it is a sweet experience of the love of God, upon which we may build our hope in the darkest night, even to call to mind these things that he hath given to us in former days. Certainly a holy and divine reflection upon these things, might persuade us that he will not shut up his tender and loving mercies unto an everlasting forgetfulness.

Now to close up our discourse upon this noble duty and grace of prayer, we shall desire this one thing of you, ‘Who are begotten unto a lively and precious hope,’ that you may be more in that noble exercise: I may say, that there is no sin which a Christian shall be more deeply convinced of, in that day when his feet shall stand upon the utmost line of time, as this sin of the neglect of the duty of prayer. And we confess, God may reprove many, ‘that they bind heavy burdens on men’s shoulders, that are grievous to be borne, and do not so much themselves as touch them with one of their fingers.’

Now, however, seriously enlarge your hearts unto this blessed exercise; for believe me, it is the way (if so we may speak) to bring down heaven upon earth. But alas! I am afraid, that this duty of prayer is not much now in practice amongst many of us in these days: is not prayer, that noble duty, almost laid by us in this evil and perverse generation, as a thing unsavoury? Oh! that ye had now a divine anticipation of that glorious enjoyment of him, which ye shall have throughout all the ages of eternity, if you be serious in this exercise. Oh! may we not walk mournfully many days in the bitterness of our souls, because we are no more in the exercise of secret prayer? O! whither is your devotions gone in these days? O! whither is it gone? I am afraid, that if these that have lived before in ancient days were now alive, doubtless they would be ignorant of us, and they would not acknowledge us for Christians. I would say this for these who never seriously practised this duty as yet, of which number there are many, O! but prayer be another thing than the most part of you conceive it to be. I think it is not only mysterious in its nature, to conceive how the spirit of man can converse with him that is the Father of spirits, how there should intervene a communion and fellowship betwixt such two. It is a mystery and riddle surely, which we cannot easily unfold. But withal, this is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation, that the exercise and practice of prayer is grown as mysterious as the nature of it. O! but there are many of you, that suppose ye are praying aright, and therefore you think all is well, who

shall be cut off as those that never prayed. I conceive, if we believe all that is spoken upon this exercise of prayer, what divine properties are requisite to a Christian, that would seriously go about the exercise of this precious duty, we might cry out, 'This is a hard saying, who can bear it?' And certainly, it is altogether impossible for us, though it be not impossible to God, to enlarge our hearts to pursue it; 'for with him nothing is impossible.' O! that if once ye might be persuaded to set about the exercise of this precious and most excellent duty of prayer, which will be to your eternal advantage, and soul everlasting concernment. I am afraid, (O Christians) that if one from heaven (who have entered unto these everlasting and blessed possessions of that excellent and blessed estate of life) would come down to earth, (if so with reverence we may speak) and preach upon this text of ours, 'Pray without ceasing;' and speak of these precious and unspeakable advantages which do accompany the man that is much in the exercise of prayer; there be many of us, I fear, would scarcely be inclined to hear such an exhortation. And more than this, if one from the dead would arise, and come from the pit unto this city, and preach upon this text unto you, 'Pray without ceasing, having the chains of everlasting wrath hanging about his neck, and preach upon these sad and unspeakable disadvantages, which are to be found in the neglect of this blessed exercise of this duty of prayer, and should desire you to flee from that wrath that is to come: O! would there not be many of you, (I am afraid) who would stop your ears, and would not listen unto the voice and language of such an exhortation? Oh! where are many of us going? Whither are we going? Certainly the apprehensions and thoughts of everlasting separation from the presence of the Lord, is not much engraven and deeply imprinted upon the spirits of hypocritical Christians of this generation, we are not afraid of that wrath and eternal destruction which is approaching unto us.

But to you that are heirs of the promise, who are heirs of the grace of life, and who are begotten again unto a lively hope, I would say this unto you, 'Pray without ceasing,' and once you shall sing without ceasing, and without all interruption. And to these that pray not, the day is coming, when they shall howl in that bottomless pit, amongst those everlasting flames of fire and brimstone, when they shall be brayed in the mortar of the wrath of God, by the pestil of his severe justice; when his Omnipotency shall uphold you, and his justice shall smite you eternally. Oh! it were many of your advantages, that you were (indeed) beasts without immortal souls; for to have souls, doth capacitate you for an eternal being, and for an eternal punishment.