

CHRIST'S FAVOUR TO LITTLE CHILDREN DISPLAYED,

IN

A SERMON,

PREACHED THE 6TH OF MARCH, 1713.

MARK X. 16.

And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.

APPLICATION was made to our Lord Jesus, when he was here upon earth, on a great variety of occasions : some we find imploring his favour upon one account, and some upon another ; some for themselves, and some for their relations ; some for the body, and some for the soul : thus was fulfilled the prediction of the dying patriarch concerning Shiloh, that *to him shall the gathering of the people be.*^a And be it observed, for the encouragement of all who humbly, and in faith, apply themselves to him,—of the *multitudes* that spread their complaints before him, he never sent *any* away from him, ashamed of their hope in him : he gave them all an answer of peace ; and they had what they came for.

But here in this paragraph, of which my text is the close, we have application made to Christ, upon an errand different from any other, but such a one as those who knew the heart of a parent, of a Christian parent, will be glad to be encouraged and directed to come to him upon, and will therefore bless God that it is here upon record. There were those who brought *young children to him, that he should touch them*, v. 13. In St. Matthew's gospel it is said, *they desired that he would put his hands upon them, and pray.*^b

Who they were that brought these children, we are not told ; whether their parents, or no ; it is most likely they were, for who should show so much concern for them as they ? Nor are we told what number of children were brought ; nor whether they were all of one family ; nor just of *what age* they were, but as to that, St. Luke tells us they were *ra*

βρεφῆ,^c it is the word which in the story of Christ's birth we translate the *babe*, in swaddling clothes, and in the manger ;^d and it is put for *new-born babes*, that desire the breast.^e The critics say it signifies a *child at nurse.*^f They are said to be brought to Christ, which intimates, that they could not go themselves ; and it is plain that they were very little, for he took them up in his arms ; so little, that he could easily hold them in one arm, for so he did when he put his hands upon them to bless them.

Christ came to teach, and heal, and bless ; to teach a world that sat in darkness, to heal a world that was sick and dying, and to bless a world that lay under the curse.

Now, 1. These children were not brought to Christ to be *taught*, for they were not yet capable of receiving instruction ; nor could they profit by his preaching, or put any questions to him. Those who are grown up to years of understanding, have need to be busy in *getting knowledge now*, that they may redeem the time they lost, through the invincible incapacities of their infancy.

Nor, 2. Were they brought to Christ to be *cured*, for it does not appear that they needed it. Little children are indeed liable to many distempers, painful, mortal ones. The physicians have a book among them, *De Morbis Infantum—on the diseases of infants*. Death and its harbingers reign even over them who have not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression,^g but these children were strong and healthful, and we do not find that any thing ailed them.

But, 3. They were brought to Christ to be *blessed* ; so they meant when they desired that he would touch them : the sign is put for the thing signified. The laying on of hands was a ceremony anciently used in blessing. When Joseph brought his two sons to Israel, and put one to his left hand, and the other

^a Gen. xlix. 10.

^b Matt. xix. 13.

^c Luke xviii. 15.

^d Luke ii. 12.

^e 3 o

^f 1 Pet. ii. 2.

^g Rom. v. 14.

* See Dr. Whitby.

to his right, that he might *touch* them, that which he desired was, that he would *bless* them:^c so these brought their children to Christ, not that he might touch and *heal* them, but that he might touch and *bless* them, with the saving strength of his right hand.

They looked upon Christ as a prophet, as a great prophet, as *that Prophet which should come into the world*, as one who had a great interest in heaven, and consequently a great influence upon this earth. Now, if he be a *Prophet* he shall *pray for thee*;^d but then thou must pay him so much respect as to desire his prayers. This honour they here give to Christ, (as it is fit those should do, who expect to receive favour from him,) in their humble request that he would lift up a prayer for their children; which they believe will avail much, as the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man.^e

It is good to have an interest in the prayers of those who are of the spiritual seed of Jacob, who seek God, and know how to wrestle with him. And to improve that interest for ourselves and our children, we should not only pray with, and for, our families ourselves, but engage the prayers of our friends for them, that we may hereby not only put an honour upon prayer, but put an honour upon our brethren; and upon the communion of saints, not only the communion of churches, but the communion of religious families, who all meet in him, in whom all the families, all the praying families, of the earth are blessed.^f A treasury of prayers laid up for our children, may stand them in better stead than thousands of gold and silver laid up for them. But if we desire this kindness of our friends, and brethren, and ministers, we must remember that one good turn requires another, and must, therefore, make conscience of praying for them and their families, as for ourselves and for our own. St. Paul, who prays so earnestly for his friends, does as earnestly desire their prayers for him.^g *The Lord give mercy to the households*^h of our acquaintance, is a petition which (or something like it) should have a place in our daily prayers.

Now the text tells us how they succeeded who brought their little children to Christ, to be blessed and prayed for; how well they succeeded.

And it is recorded by *three* of the evangelists; because it was a manifest indication of the design of Christ, to continue to the children of believers under the New-Testament dispensation, the same covenant right, and visible church membership, that they had under the Old-Testament dispensation, by virtue of God's promise to Abraham and his seed, that blessing of Abraham, which comes upon the Gentiles through Jesus Christ;ⁱ and because it gives us great encouragement, when we come to

Christ ourselves, to bring our children with us, and present them also to him.

They who brought these infants to Christ, were frowned upon and discountenanced by the disciples; they rebuked them, because they would not have such a needless trouble (so they thought it) given to their Master, who had other work enough upon his hands. If this be encouraged, they shall see no end of it. Was it not enough that he cured the sick, which none but he could do, but he must bless the healthy too, which others might do? How well is it for us, that our Master has more tenderness and compassion than the best of his ministers have; and is touched more nearly than they are, or can be, with the feeling of our infirmities,^j and an inclination to gratify those innocent desires of humble and believing supplicants, which those who think themselves polite and refined, look upon with a slight, as not worth taking notice of. In grace and goodness he is God and not man;^k nay, he is both God and man: as man, he has himself suffered, being tempted, and is therefore able with the greater sympathy, to succour them who are tempted;^l and as God, in doing good his thoughts and ways are infinitely above ours, the best of ours, above those of the best of us.^m

As, when God promised to show Moses his *glory*, he proclaimed all his *goodness*, and caused that to pass before him;ⁿ so our Lord Jesus, when he would let his chosen ones *see his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father*, he showed himself upon all occasions *full of grace*.^o Among men it is looked upon to be the symptom of a sweet and loving disposition, to take notice of little children, and to be familiar with them.^p By this, among many other instances, our Lord Jesus showed himself to be kind and benign, meek and lowly in heart; that, upon all occasions, he discovered a particular kindness for little children, and never more than upon this occasion, when he gave a severe reprimand to his disciples for prohibiting those who brought their children to him; he was *ἡναγκαριστος*—*much displeased at it*; he was both *sorry* and *angry* that his own disciples did not better know his mind, and that they should be adversaries to those for whom they ought to have been advocates: and he gave orders immediately that *they* should be called to him *who brought the children*, (who, perhaps, upon the disciples' check, were going off,) and that room should be made for them to come to him: by all means *suffer the little children to come to me, and do not forbid them*; for they belong to the church *still, as much as ever*; the *kingdom of God* which I come to set up includes them. They are within the allegiance of Messiah the Prince, and he will own them as his subjects.

And not only for the satisfaction of those who

^c Gen. xlviii. 13. ^d Gen. xx. 7. ^e Jam. v. 16. ^f Gen. xii. 3.
^g Rom. xv. 30. ^h 2 Tim. i. 16. ⁱ Gal. iii. 14.

^j Heb. iv. 15. ^k Hos. xi. 9. ^l Heb. ii. 18. ^m Isa. lv. 9.
ⁿ Exod. xxxiii. 18, 19. ^o John i. 14. ^p 1 Pet. ii. 3.

brought them, and to please them, but for the benefit and advantage of the children, he took them up, with a great deal of endearing tenderness, in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them; did not only *pray* for a blessing, as they desired, but *commanded the blessing*, as one having authority, even *life for evermore*,^a which is inclusive of all blessings.

But what encouragement (you will say) does this give to us? Christ is not now among us as he was then; and we cannot either make such addresses to him, or receive such favours from him, as they then might. It is true we cannot in such a sensible manner, but we may as really in a spiritual way, make our applications to him, and expect communications from him; for in him all fulness dwells, to him all judgment is committed, and the knee of every supplicant must bow to him: and we are sure he has blessings as much at command now as ever he had. And, therefore, from the kind entertainment he gave to these children who were *brought* to him, we are warranted to infer his readiness to receive our children that are *offered up to him*, for it is certain never any one was the worse for going to heaven.

From hence observe then, That our Lord Jesus has given us great encouragement to hope, that he will favourably accept our little children, when, in a right manner, we bring them to him for a blessing.

I shall endeavour to show, I. How we must now bring our little children to Christ. II. What entertainment we may promise ourselves they shall find with him, according to this instance in the text. And then, III. Make application.

Those who are truly ambitious of this honour for their children, and covetous of this wealth for them, to have them blessed of Christ, cannot but wish to know how they may bring their children to him, so that they may hope to obtain his favour. *Say not in thine heart, "Who shall ascend into heaven,"* where Christ sits at God's right hand, and take my children with him thither to receive his blessing?^b No: the word of God is nigh to thee; and Christ in the word, and his blessings, to be received by faith, applying the word to ourselves. The tabernacle of God is among us; the priests, the spiritual sacrifices, the Israel of God,—where two or three of them are gathered in his name, he will be in the midst of them,^c both to receive their homage, and to give out his favours. Where his ordinances are administered according to his institution, and those things which he has commanded, observed and taught, there will he be all the days, even *to the end of the world*;^d there he records his name, and there will meet his people, and *bless them*; nay, wherever a true Christian is, there is a living temple, in which God is served and honoured, and his blessings and favours communicated, by his Spirit dwelling in the heart.

There is still a way of access to Christ, a new and living way, by which we may not only come to Christ ourselves, but bring others to him, bring ours to him, our children, who are pieces of ourselves.

Four ways we must bring our children to Christ:

1. By surrendering them to him. When by a deliberate and solemn act of our souls, we resign and give up, with ourselves, the children also which God has graciously given us, to the Lord Jesus, to be to him for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory;^e to be Christians, devoted to his honour, and employed in his service; to be members of that body whereof he is the head, servants in that family whereof he is the Master, and subjects in that kingdom of his among men, which is incorporated by that great gospel charter, *Disciple all nations into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*;^f then we may bring our children to Christ: we present them to him,^g (a poor present to him who has a world of angels at command, yet such as he requires and will accept of,) as living sacrifices, which we desire may be holy and acceptable; it is our reasonable service.

Parents are invested by nature in a right to their children, and an authority over them for their good. A daughter in her father's house was accounted by the law not *sui juris*—her own right; he could disannul her vows.^h Now this right in our children we must not only acknowledge to be subordinate to that prior superior title God has to them; for we are only the fathers of their flesh, he is the Father of their spirits;ⁱ but we must also transfer to our Lord Jesus, whom the Father has constituted the great trustee, both of all the powers with which he intended mankind should be ruled, and of all the *favours* with which he intended mankind should be blessed.

Our children are God's children; (they are *my sons and my daughters*, saith God, *which thou hast borne unto me*;^j) and therefore it is sacrilege to alienate them from him, and to devote them to the service of the world and the flesh; it is profaning the holy things of the Lord our God. And it is our duty to dedicate them and dispose of them as he directs. Now he directs us to give them up to Christ; to enrol them among his disciples; to enter their names among his servants,^k who being born in his house, belong to his family, and are entitled to the protection and provisions of it, and taken under the order and discipline of it.

That is a great word, and speaks much of the dignity and power of our Lord Jesus; *The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hands*.^l All the things that concern his honour and government, all his part of the matters in variance between himself and fallen man, he has put into the hands of the Mediator, as referee of the controversy, the

^a Ps. cxviii. 3. ^b Rom. x. 6, 8. ^c Matt. xviii. 20.
^d Matt. xxviii. 19, 20. ^e Jer. xiii. 11. ^f Matt. xxviii. 19.
3 o 2

^g Rom. xii. 1. ^h Numb. xxx. 5. ⁱ Heb. xii. 9.
^j Ezek. xvi. 20. ^k Ps. cxvi. 16. ^l John iii. 35.

blessed Day's-man, who has laid his hand upon us both. Now that which he requires of us (and with good reason) is, that we love the Son, and give all things into his hand; all our interests and concerns; and particularly our children, who were made and born for immortality, who are entered into a state of probation and preparation for eternity, whom therefore we commit to him as to their Guardian: by whose gospel, life and immortality are brought to light,^h and brought to hand.

Hereby we do honour to the exalted Redeemer, and recognize his authority; as one to whom the Father has therefore given power over all flesh, especially over the spirits of all flesh, that he should *give eternal life to as many as he had given him,*ⁱ as many of them. We own his dominion both in heaven and on earth, by owning his indisputable title to our children; both to their bodies, by which they are allied to the earth, and to their souls, by which they are allied to heaven and the world of spirits.

Hereby we confess, that as we ourselves, so our children, are more his than our own; and therefore we desire that both we and ours may live to him. And in thus honouring the Son we honour the Father also; for Christ came to bring us to himself, that he might bring us to God.^k Our children are therefore brought to Christ, the Mediator of the covenant, that through him they may be brought to God, as their God in covenant. When Israel was taken into covenant with God, express notice is taken not only of their captains, and elders, and officers, but of their little ones, as parties to the covenant which the Lord their God made with them.^l

Hereby we do *well* for our children, the *best* we can do for them, for we give them up to him who is able to do that for them which we cannot do, and which must be done for them, or they are undone. We know they derive through our loins sinful and corrupt natures; we know they are shapen in iniquity, they are called, and not miscalled, *transgressors from the womb*:^m what therefore can we do for them, but bring them to him who came to save sinners, to save them from their sins? They are born polluted; and by presenting them to Christ, we bring them to the fountain that was opened for Judah and Jerusalem to wash in from sin, which is uncleanness.ⁿ They are born distempered; and we thus bring them to the great Physician, to have their temperament corrected, to have their very constitution altered; to have not the mass of their blood, but of their minds, changed for the better, that *as they have borne the image of the earthly, they may also bear the image of the heavenly*.^o

Now this solemn surrender of our children to God

as theirs in covenant, if we ourselves be in covenant with God, I think ought to be done by the ordinance of baptism; an ordinance peculiar to the Redeemer's kingdom, and a seal, as circumcision was, of the righteousness which is by faith,^p and therefore, like it, belonging both to believers and to their infant seed. Our Saviour, when he instituted that ordinance, gave a double intimation concerning his gospel kingdom which was then to be set up. One was, that it must not be *confined to the Jews*, but *spread to the Gentiles*; therefore go and *make all nations disciples*. The other was, that it should not be *confined to that generation*, and live and die with the apostles. It must not be (as the historian says of the Roman commonwealth) *Res unius ætatis*—a thing confined to one age; no, it must continue, for Christ *will* continue at the head of it, and in the midst of it, always, even to the end of the world. Now, as baptism did subserve the former design, and attended the progress of the gospel to the most distant regions of the earth; so we have reason to think it was instituted equally to subserve the latter design, and to attend the propagating of the gospel to the latest ages of time; that by taking early hold of the seed of the faithful, and giving their parents, and ministers, and consciences, early hold of them, provision might be made (as was by the altar, *Erd.*) that nothing might make them cease from fearing the Lord:^q that thus a seed might serve the Lord Jesus, which should be accounted to him for a generation.^r And by keeping up the entail, and as it were by a continual claim, the name of Christ might endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven.^s

But waving this dispute; I insist upon that, in which I am sure we are all agreed, that our children are to be given up to the Lord Jesus; (and *of his own* do we give him, for he has *bought them with a price*;^t) that they may glorify him in body and spirit, and he may be honoured even by *their* hosannas. We lend them to the Lord, as Hannah did Samuel,^u that they may be his all the days of their life; and if they be so, they shall be his to the endless ages of eternity.

2. We must bring them to Christ, by seeking to him *for* them, as those who are surrendered to him. They are to be but once baptized, but they are to be daily prayed for, and the promise sealed to them in their baptism put in suit and pleaded with God in their behalf. These brought their children to Christ, when they begged his blessing on them, and thus we must bring ours to him; bring their case to him, the case of their souls, their precious souls, which ought to be laid nearer our hearts than any thing else that concerns them.

^h 2 Tim. i. 10.

ⁱ John xvii. 2.

^k 1 Pet. iii. 18.

^l Deut. xxix. 10–12.

^m Isa. xlviii. 8.

ⁿ Zech. xiii. 1.

^o 1 Cor. xv. 49.

^p Rom. iv. 11.

^q Josh. xxii. 25, 34.

^r Ps. xxii. 29, 30.

^s Ps. lxxxix. 28.

^t 1 Cor. vi. 20.

^u 1 Sam. i. 28.

When Christ was here upon earth, we read of many who applied themselves to him for mercy for their children: *Lord, have mercy upon my son,** saith one; *Lord, have mercy upon my daughter,*† saith another: and the children fared the better for the faith and prayers of the parents. And we may, as easily, come to him now he is in heaven, and more easily; and with the same petition: *Lord, have mercy on my son, on my daughter, who is foolish, and vain, and carnally minded, (which is death,‡) and much under the power of Satan. Even our little children's souls are to be prayed for; for we believe they are born in sin, and foolishness is bound in their hearts; and we see how soon corrupt nature appears and works in them, and how the tares spring up with the wheat: let us therefore be earnest with God for the operation of his grace upon their hearts betimes; that Christ be formed in their souls when they are young, and they may be sanctified from their infancy. They are thine, save them.*§ Ishmael was very young when Abraham prayed so affectionately, *O that Ishmael might live before thee!*¶

Our children are capable of being prayed for, and of receiving benefit by prayer, before they are capable of being taught, and of receiving benefit by instruction: and as their being baptized lays us under an engagement to teach them, so it gives us an encouragement to pray for them; and we should begin early to do it. Look up to Christ, and beg of him to bless them with all spiritual blessings in heavenly things, which will be the best provision and the best portion for them.

Be *constant* in praying for your children; pray for them as duly as for yourselves, as St. Paul for his friends, making mention of them always in every prayer. Be *particular* in praying for them; pray for each particular child, as holy Job offered burnt-offerings for his sons, according to the number of them all; that you may be able to say, as Hannah, *For this child I prayed:*‡ pray for particular blessings for your children, according as you see their case requires, for *that* grace which you observe their natural temper (or distemper rather) calls for.

Let us take heed lest our prayers degenerate into formality, and we pray for them only from custom, and in no better manner than we can soon teach them to pray for themselves, and for us too, by rote: but let us pray for them, from a principle of concern for their precious souls; in the prosperity and welfare of which *their* happiness, and *our* comfort in them, is bound up. When a child is born, there is a candle lighted that must burn to eternity, either in heaven or hell; the consideration whereof should awaken us to pray with all possible earnestness for the salvation of their souls, next to that of our own.

When they are *little*, they cannot pray for them-

selves; and if you *do not* pray for them, who *should*? When they are *grown up*, it may be they are careless, and will not pray for themselves to any purpose, and then their case is the more piteous; it may be they are wicked and profane, and hate prayer, yet continue to pray for them, for while there is life there is hope, and while there is hope, there is room for prayer; and who knows but he who waits to be gracious, may at length be gracious to you, and your child that is dead may be alive again.¶

Have an eye to Christ in all your prayers for your children; let the prayer be directed to *him*, as it was here. It was in his name particularly that they were baptized, and therefore in his name they must be prayed for, and into his hands all our petitions to God must be put. We may with him plead their baptism: "*Lord, they are given up to thee to be thine; make them thine own, then own them as thine.*" Plead his interest in them as the children of his family, the lambs of his flock, the pets of his school; plead your dedication of them to him, and his acceptance of them; and resolve to leave them with him.

It is by prayer that we *cast our care* upon God; cast it upon the Lord Jesus, to whom the Father has committed all judgment, and who is intrusted with the administration of the providential kingdom, in subserviency to the mediatorial kingdom. Our children are a considerable part of our care; what they will prove, and what will become of them: we must by prayer cast this care upon Christ; and believe that the children of the greatest are not above the need of his care, nor those of the meanest beneath the cognizance of it.

3. We must bring them to Christ, by submitting them to the disposal of his providence. When we have by prayer sought to him *for* them, we must by a cheerful acquiescence in his wisdom and goodness, make ourselves easy concerning them; believing, that Christ knows what is fit for them and us, better than we do. We bring them to Christ, when we bring our will, concerning them, into an entire submission to his will; believing that he will be sanctified, and resolving that then we will be satisfied.¶

Let us make Christ guardian to our children, not only when we are dead, but while we live; trust them with him, and put them under his protection; as Jacob did his children when he was parting with them, *God Almighty give you mercy!*¶ and when he was parting from them, *The Angel that redeemed me from all evil!* (and that can be no other than the Lord Jesus, the angel of the covenant) *bless the lads!*

When we can refer it to the divine will, whether our children shall be healthful or sickly, high or low, rich or poor, prosperous or crossed, thriving or declining in the world; whether they shall live to

* Matt. xvii. 15.
† Ps. cxix. 94.

‡ Matt. xv. 22.
§ Gen. xvii. 18.

¶ Rom. viii. 6.
• Job i. 5.

¶ 1 Sam i. 27.

• Gen. xliii. 14.

¶ 2 Sam. xii. 22.

¶ Lev. x. 3.

† Gen. xlviii. 16.

be old, or die young; provided it may but go well with their precious souls, and they may be happy to eternity; then we bring them to Christ, as a skillful, faithful Physician, willing he should take what method he pleases with them, so he will but cure them, and save them. I have read of a good man, whose son being disposed of in the world, met with great affliction, which he once very feelingly complained of to his good father, who answered, (according to the principle I am now upon,) "Any thing, child, to bring thee to heaven."

4. We must bring them to Christ, by subjecting them, as far as we can, to the government of his grace. Having laid their necks under the yoke of Christ in their baptism, we must teach them to draw in it, and use our interest in them, and authority over them, to keep them under that easy yoke, and bring them up in the nurture and admonition of our Lord Jesus.^g

Having got them enrolled among his servants, we must teach them, betimes, to know their Master, and to own his dominion over them, and their obligations to him; bring them into their Master's presence, bring them to see him, bring them to hear him, by bringing them to his word and ordinances. Feed your kids beside the shepherds' tents;^h let them have family instruction, as soon as they are capable of receiving it, and be brought to sit under the public ministry, as soon as they are capable of not being a disturbance to it.

Bring them to Christ's feet, by taking pains to impress upon their minds the indispensable necessity of their being taught and ruled by Jesus Christ, of their believing his truths, and obeying his laws, in order to their present and eternal welfare. We brought them to Christ, by an instituted *sign* of their being his, in their baptism; we bring them to Christ, by the instituted *means* of their being his, in their religious education; both those we second with prayer, that they may be his: thus far we must go, and further we cannot.

II. You see how you may bring your little children to Christ. I come next to show you, for your encouragement, how you may hope he will receive those who are thus brought to him, and what entertainment they may expect; surely, something like the kind entertainment he here gave to these little ones: He took them up in his arms, put his hand upon them, and blessed them. Such visible, sensible signs of his favour we are not now to expect, but *that* which is more than equivalent in spiritual blessings.

Only let me premise, that we cannot be so confident of God's giving his grace to our children, if we in sincerity pray to him for it, and use the means, as we may be of his giving it to ourselves, if we do

so. Many a godly parent no doubt has brought his children to Christ, as before directed, who, yet, have proved wicked and vile, and strangers to Christ, and come short of his blessing, but it has been through their own default. Many are sacramentally regenerated, and born again of water, by which they have been partakers of the Christian name, who, yet, are never really regenerated, and born again of the Spirit, but live and die destitute of the nature of Christians. All we can say is, that if we thus bring our children to Christ, they stand much fairer for, and nearer to, his blessing, than if they be not brought to him. There are promises and precedents which we may take encouragements from, and upon which we are caused to hope, that Christ will give them his grace, will work his *good work* in them, both as a token of, and as a qualification for, his *good will* towards them; and if he do, it will be an addition to our comfort, that it is an answer to our prayers, and the fruit of our labours; if he do not, it will be a support to us under our grief, to have the testimony of our conscience that, by the grace of God, we have in some measure done our duty, and then left the event with God, whose grace is his own.

Let us now observe the instance of Christ's favour to these children; and inquire what we may expect that has some resemblance of it.

1. *He took them up in his arms.* See how Christ does more for humble believing supplicants than they can ask or think? it was only desired he would touch them, but he did more, he embraced them; and it speaks not only his wonderful condescension, but his compassion and affection. A little while previously, when he had occasion to set a little child before his disciples as a pattern of humility, he not only set the child in the midst of them, which was sufficient to answer his intention; but he took him in his arms,ⁱ to show his tender love to those who are as little children. (*When Israel was a child then I loved him.*^j) This spake the kindness our Saviour^k had for the human nature and race; his *φιλανθρωπία*—his joy in the habitable part of the earth, and his delight in the sons of men.^l

Christ took up these children in his arms as one well pleased with them, and concerned for them; that the Scripture might be fulfilled which said concerning him, *He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, he shall gather his lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom.*^m Time was, when he himself was taken up in old Simeon's arms.ⁿ And he did himself pass through the age of infancy, to make it honourable and comfortable to the children of his people; and the expressions of his favour afterwards to little children, make it much more so: when their mothers and nurses carry them in their arms, and

^g Eph. vi. 4. ^h Cant. i. 8. ⁱ John iii. 5.
^k Mark ix. 36. ^l Hos. xi. 1.

^m Tit. iii. 3. ⁿ Prov. viii. 31.
^o Isa. xl. 11. ^p Luke ii. 26.

are almost tired with the load, let them refresh themselves with this thought, that the Holy Child Jesus was carried in arms, and did himself take up little children in his arms. When Moses was charged thus to bear Israel, he found himself aggrieved, *Have I conceived all this people? Have I begotten them, that thou shouldst say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom as a nursing father bears the sucking child?* But what Moses complained of, Christ had complacency in; he took them up in his arms: it is but one word in the original, *ἡγαλασσάμενος*—he *inarmed* them, he *took them into his embraces*; as he did his spouse, who said with satisfaction, *His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me.*[†]

But *how* may we hope he will take our children in his arms, when we bring them to him? Surely we may promise ourselves no less than what David promised himself, *When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.*[‡] We may hope,

(1.) That he will take them up in the arms of his power and providence; that he will *hold their souls* in life, and protect them from, or carry them through, the weaknesses and perils of the infant age: that he will give *his angels*,[†] the *little ones*—[‡] angels, *a charge concerning them*, to bear them in *their arms*; and *their arms* are *his arms*, the arms of his power. The name of the Lord is a strong tower,[‡] into which the righteous are not only welcome to run themselves, but to bring their children; and where they and theirs may hope to be safe, so safe, as that no real evil, no only evil, shall befall them. The arm of the Lord is revealed in favour of the little ones, even of a sinful race; witness those of unbelieving murmuring Israel: But your little ones, though living in a barren wilderness, and likely to be made a prey, them will I bring into that land which I have promised, and you have despised.[‡] Much more shall it be stretched out for the relief and preservation of the faithful seed, whose refuge the eternal God[‡] is, and will be, and underneath them are the everlasting arms; such are the arms of the Lord Jesus, which cannot faint or be weary, and by which all things are upheld, else they would sink.

That Divine Providence which supports children in their childhood, and carries them through that helpless age; which puts it into the hearts of parents to provide for them; which preserves to them their limbs and senses, of which they might, by a thousand accidents, be deprived in a moment; by which they grow in strength and stature; is to be mentioned to the honour of the Redeemer, to whom it is owing that the race of mankind continues *in being* upon the face of the earth, though guilty and obnoxious. It is in the Redeemer's arms, by whom

all things consist,[†] that children are borne up, and carried on to full age; for to him are owing all the reprieves of God's patience,[‡] and all the gifts of his common providence. This we have all experienced ourselves, and must acknowledge it with thankfulness to the Redeemer's praise, as the royal Psalmist does: *Thou art he that took me out of the womb; thou didst make me hope, and keepest me in safety when I was upon my mother's breast: I was cast upon thee from the womb; thou art my God from my mother's belly.*[‡] *By thee have I been holden up, and therefore my praise shall be continually of thee.*[‡] And what we have experienced ourselves, we may humbly expect for our children, if we bring them to Christ, to whom we have brought ourselves.

(2.) That he will take them up in the arms of his *pity and grace*; that he will in compassion to their precious souls, the case of which by nature is very piteous, undertake to cleanse and cure them, to sanctify and save them; that, as in his love and pity he has shed his blood to wash from sin, and so prepared the laver, he will, in love to them, and pity to them, sprinkle that purifying, healing blood upon them, that they may by it be washed from their sin, and sanctified for God, as *their God*.

The loveliest, sweetest babe we ever saw, though like Moses in the ark of bulrushes, exceeding fair, to admiration, yet, like him, it is born in a land of Egypt, in a house of bondage; like him, marked for the sword as soon as born; nay, it is like the infant in Ezekiel's parable, *polluted in its own blood*, and cast out to the loathing of its person;[‡] it is shapen in iniquity, it is born in sin, and its precious soul is defiled and deformed, and an object of pity. This is a melancholy thought, and a damp to the pleasure we take in our children. But this is a comfort: that Christ has compassion on them, has arms to gather them up in, and has given us hopes that he will say unto them, *Live*, yea, he will say unto them, *Live*;[‡] will wash them from their filth, will clothe them with his grace: (and the *time* will be a *time of love* indeed, both to them and us:) that he will embrace them, as the father of the prodigal did his returning son, when he fell on his neck and kissed him;[‡] will receive them into the arms of a covenant of grace, out of which they shall never be plucked, and in which they shall be for ever easy and happy.

2. He put his hands upon them:[†] they desired he would *touch them*, one touch from Christ has done wonders; but he did more, he *put his hands on them*, as he did on John when he said, *Fear not*; and as he did on many whom he cured; to intimate that virtue went out of him for the purpose to which he intended it.

† Numb. xl. 12. ‡ Cant. ii. 6. ‡ Ps. xxvii. 10.
‡ Matt. xviii. 10. ‡ Ps. xci. 12. ‡ Prov. xviii. 10.
‡ Numb. xiv. 31. ‡ Deut. xxxiii. 27.

† Col. i. 16. ‡ 2 Pet. iii. 15. ‡ Ps. xxii. 9, 10.
‡ Ps. lxxi. 5, 6. ‡ Ezek. xvi. 5, 9. ‡ Ezek. xvi. 9, 10.
‡ Luke xv. 20. ‡ Rev. i. 17.

But *how* may we hope that Jesus Christ will now put his hands upon us and ours?

(1.) If he set us and ours apart for himself,^a as his own peculiar people, we may say he puts his hand upon us and ours: as the buyer lays his hand on the goods he has agreed for, they are now his own; as Jacob put his hand on the head of Joseph's sons, to signify not only his blessing them, but his adopting them, and taking them for his own, *Let my name be named upon them.*^b This we hope Christ does for our children, when we bring them to him; he owns them for his; and we may say they do in some degree belong to Christ, are retainers to his family.

It is an honour and comfort to have our little children called Christians, called by Christ's name; to have them numbered among his peculiar ones, among the servants born in his house, distinguished from the children of heathens, who have not the knowledge of God and Christ; to have them added to the church, which is God's treasure in the world; planted in his vineyard, sown in his field, to be a holy seed, a seed for God; especially if we have some good hopes, through grace, that they are not only admitted to a place in the courts of God's house now, but are designed for his holy place above, for the congregation of the righteous there. If Christ will but put his hand upon them, and say, They shall be mine in that day when I make up my jewels,^c we have enough, we have all we wished for in bringing them to him.

(2.) If he give his Holy Spirit to us and ours, it may truly be said, he puts his hand upon us and them. The Spirit is sometimes called the *finger of God*, and sometimes the *hand of God*;^d so that Christ's putting his hand upon us,^e not only puts us into a relation to him, but works a real change in us; lays hold on the soul for him, and puts his *image*, as well as *superscription*, upon it. The laying on of hands was a ceremony used in conferring the Holy Ghost; and this we pray for, and hope for, from Christ, for our children, when we bring them to him.

And there are *words* upon which he has encouraged us to hope for this. We find it possible that children may be sanctified from their birth,^f that they may be filled with the Holy Ghost from their mother's womb;^g nay, we find it promised, That God will pour his Spirit upon our seed, and his blessing, that blessing, that blessing of blessings, upon our offspring:^h that *his Spirit upon thee shall not depart from thy seed*:ⁱ that his Spirit shall be poured out upon our sons and daughters:^j that our children shall all be taught of the Lord, and great shall be their peace:^k the *New-Testament* promise

is to us and to our children; not only *that* of the forgiveness of sins, but *that* of the gift of the Holy Ghost.^l These are the true sayings of God; and we may put them in suit, and expect the performance of them for our children, when we bring them to Christ. And O that he would thus *put his hand upon them*.

3. He blessed them. He was desired to pray for a blessing for them, but he did more, he commanded 'the blessing, blessed with authority; he pronounced them blessed, and thereby made them so; for those whom he bleaseth are blessed indeed. Christ is the great High Priest, whose office it is to bless the people of God, and all theirs. When he parted from his disciples at his ascension, he blessed them;^m he left blessings behind him for his church on earth, and all the members of it the little ones not excepted.

When God took Abraham into covenant, he promised to bless him; and the blessing wherewith he blessed him was, *I will be a God to thee and to thy seed*:ⁿ but that was not all, he promised that in the Messiah, who should descend from his loins, all the nations of the earth should be blessed;^o not only blessed *by* him, but blessed *in* him, in that righteousness and salvation which should be wrought out and brought in by him. The transferring of this blessing was the great care and business of the patriarchs; Jacob and Esau strove for it, and Jacob got it; the Jews sinned it away, for themselves, but not for the world; and therefore, by the gospel, this blessing of Abraham comes upon the Gentiles,^p that comprehensive blessing, that God will be a God to them who believe, and to their seed: this blessing Christ has the conferring of, for he is the Mediator of the covenant, and Trustee of the blessings of it. Now if we, in faith, bring our children to him, as Mediator, we may hope he will bestow this blessing upon *them* with other the children of the church; for St. Peter gives the *Jews* this reason why God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless *them*, because they were the children of the prophets, and of the covenant.^q Now if we and ours be children of the prophets, and of the covenant, of the prophets by our assent to gospel truths; and of the covenant, by our consent to gospel terms, we may hope to inherit (and our seed after us) that blessing which Christ was sent to bestow.

The prayers made by the Israel of God, for all its members, from the *least* to the greatest, are encouraging to our hopes that they shall share in the blessing: our children are not only prayed for by us, as parts of our family, but they are prayed for by all that in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ,^r their Lord and ours, as belonging to Christ's family,

^a Ps. iv. 3. ^b Gen. xlviii. 16. ^c Mal. iii. 17. ^d Luke xi. 20.
^e Ezek. iii. 14. ^f Jer. i. 5. ^g Luke i. 15.
^h Isa. xlv. 3. ⁱ Isa. lix. 21. ^j Joel ii. 28.

^k Isa. liv. 13. ^l Acts ii. 38, 39. ^m Pa. cxxxiii. 3.
ⁿ Luke xxiv. 50. ^o Gen. xvii. 7. ^p Gen. xii. 2, 3.
^q Gal. iii. 14. ^r Acts iii. 23, 26. ^s 1 Cor. i. 2.

to the *nursery* in that family; the welfare and prosperity of which, all who are concerned for the perpetuating of Christ's name and throne, cannot but have a particular and tender concern for. In bringing them to Christ, we bring them within the prayers of all good Christians; which we hope may obtain a blessing for them.

The promises made to the Israel of God are yet more encouraging; especially since Christ came to confirm the promises made to the fathers,^a that in him they might be *Yea* and *Amen*. Now it is promised, that the *generation of the upright shall be blessed*;^b that the *seed of God's servants shall be established before him*;^c that they shall be so remarkably pious and prosperous, that *all who see them shall acknowledge them*,^d that *they are the seed which the Lord has blessed*. Lord, be it unto thy servants according to the word which thou hast spoken.

III. THE APPLICATION.

1. Let me hence address myself to children, to little children, to the lambs of the flock, to the youngest who can hear with understanding:^e will not you be glad to hear this, that the Lord Jesus Christ has a tender concern and affection for you; and that he has blessings in store for you, if you apply yourselves to him, according to your capacity? Shall I speak to you in the words of David? *Come ye children, hearken to me, and I will teach you*,^f as young as you are, *the fear of the Lord*; nay, I would teach you not only the fear of God, but the faith of Christ; and therefore address myself to you, in the words of St. Paul, *My little children, of whom I travail in birth again, until Christ be formed in you*,^g till his image be renewed upon you, and he live in you.^h

You hear, dear little ones, what Christ has done for you, what favour he has showed to those of *your age*: and will not you put in for an interest in his favour, and the provisions he has made for the entertainment of children? Has he thus loved you, and will not you love him? Has he such kind thoughts toward you, and will not you have dutiful thoughts toward him? Does he invite you to him, and will not you accept of his invitation? He says here: *Suffer little children* not only to be brought to me, but *to come to me*; to come as they can themselves, to make it their own act and deed; and do not forbid them, for it is possible, that of those of their age may be the kingdom of God, that they may get to heaven.

You love those who take notice of you, and play with you, and give you toys; and will you not love those who pray for you, and instruct you, and would bring you to be acquainted with the best things? Will you not reckon them your friends indeed, who seek the welfare of your souls, your eternal welfare?

Be sensible betimes of the corruption of your na-

ture, that *foolishness is bound in your heart*; and give all diligence to get a change wrought in you. Begin betimes to put a difference between God's name and other names, God's book and other books, God's day and other days. Be dutiful to your parents; and labour to be a comfort to them. Love prayer, learn to pray, and be much in it. Mortify your passions, keep them under, and do not indulge them. Hate and abhor lying, and make conscience of speaking truth.

There are little books, both of counsels and examples, suited to your age: "*The Token for Children*," by Mr. Janeway, and Mr. White's *Little Book for Little Children*; which you should not be strangers to. Love your *catechism*, and hold fast the form of sound words, which you have heard; but above all, see to it that from your childhood you know the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise to salvation.

Lay yourselves at Christ's feet, and he will take you up in his arms. Give yourselves to him, and he will give himself in his graces and comforts to you. Lie in his way, by a diligent attendance on his ordinances, and he will not pass by without putting his hand on you. And if you value his blessings aright, and be earnest with him for his blessings, he will bless you with the best of blessings, such as will make you eternally blessed.

2. This passage affords both direction and encouragement to Christian parents: *I write unto you fathers*, and unto you mothers, who have a tender concern for your children, and desire they may do well, and would fain do well for them. Observe the entertainment Christ gave to the children who were brought to him, and see it written *for your learning*.

(1.) Let this direct us, who are parents, concerning our children. We have seen *how* we are to bring them to Christ; and have we *thus* brought them to him? We brought them to baptism; but did we thereupon bring them to Christ? Was it done as unto the Lord? If it was, let us now make it to appear. Have we brought our children to Christ, with hopes that they have been accepted of him?

[1.] Let us then still *bring them to him*, by faith and prayer, according as their case requires; be daily *laying them at his feet*, by resigning them to his conduct, and referring all events concerning them to his wise and gracious disposal; be daily *putting them in his arms*, by entreating his favour towards them, as that which is the life of their souls, and better than the life of the body.

You see here *what* to desire and pray for, for your children: *that the Mediator's blessing may be their portion*; for that is a portion for the soul and eternity, a good part that shall never be taken away from those who have it. Covet not *great things* in

^a Rom. xv. 8.
^c Ps. cii. 28.

^b Ps. cxlii. 2.
^d Isa. vi. 9.

^e Neh. viii. 2.
^g Gal. iv. 19.

^f Ps. xxxiv. 11.
^h Gal. ii. 20.

the world for them, a little will serve to bear their charges through it; but be earnest with God for blessings for them *in heavenly things by Christ Jesus*; let them have these, and they have enough.

When you bless your children, (and it is good sometimes to do it solemnly,) let your eye be to Christ, in whom alone it is that blessings are entailed on us and ours, and through whose hand they are derived. The patriarchs in blessing their sons had an eye to a Christ to come; and to him, now he is come, much more ought *we* to have an eye.

Pray daily with your children, and servants; that they may hear you pray for them, and may thereby be taught and quickened to pray for themselves. I hope none of you dare live in the neglect of family prayer, dare omit it, either morning or evening, when you know that, instead of the blessing of Christ, the wrath and curse of God is poured out on the families that call not on his name.¹ While you and your families live without prayer, you live without God; you make no joint acknowledgment of him, and can expect no joint receiving from him. It may justly be feared that those who throw aside so necessary, so comfortable, so advantageous a duty as family prayer is, do not make conscience of secret prayer neither, but frequently omit it, or at least do not make a business of it, but suffer it to degenerate into a formality. And how can you expect *daily blessings* upon your children, if you do not *daily* ask for them? or to have an interest in the intercession which Jesus Christ is continually making for us in heaven, if you do not pray continually morning and evening, in the virtue of that intercession. Have you settled a correspondence between Christ and your families, by devoting your children to him in their baptism? and will you not keep up that correspondence? How can you expect the benefit of it, if you do not on your part keep it up?

You who have the charge of families, remember that you are Christians, and ought in that capacity to confess Christ, and to own and honour him before your families. There is such a general disuse of Christian conference, that most are ashamed by that to acknowledge Christ before their neighbours; but they cannot have that pretence to decline it before their own children and servants. If therefore with the heart you believe unto righteousness,² think how necessary it is, that thus with the mouth you make confession unto salvation. Remember that your family is a family of *Christians*, not a herd of *negroes*, I should say a herd of *brute beasts*; (for those who have charge of negroes ought to pray for them, and to have them prayed with;) and you look upon them as no better than brute beasts, if you do not pray with them; nay, and worse, for the

ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but you go not before them in acknowledging their great Owner, nor lead them to the footstool of their Master's throne of grace. But I hope better things of you.

Use the baptism of your children, as an argument with yourselves to pray with them; and then you may use it as a plea with God, for the mercies you ask of him for them. "Lord Jesus, I have presented my children to thee, and thou hast accepted them. I still present them to thee, and wilt not thou still accept them? Thou hast blessed them: wilt thou not say they shall be blessed? and then they are blessed indeed."

[2.] Let us then bring them up for him. Have we any good hope, through grace, that Christ has owned our dedication of ours to him, has taken them up in his arms, put his hands on them, and blessed them? let us then receive each of them from him again, as given to us with the same charge that Pharaoh's daughter gave to Moses's mother, *Take this child and nurse it for me*. You are to look upon your children as given up to Christ, and to manage them accordingly.

Has Christ showed such a tender affection to your little children? be not you then hardened against them, do not rule them with rigour; provoke them not to wrath,³ lest they be discouraged. Be gentle among them, for so the nurse cherishes her children.⁴ Study to make your children love you; and then every thing you enjoin them will be easy. When you are angry at them, let it be for that only, for which you know Christ would be angry at them; and that is for their sins, which must be restrained by the rod and reproof, not for their weaknesses and childish infirmities, which time will wear off. Has Christ blessed your children, and put honour upon them? Do not you curse them, and give them such scurrilous language as Saul gave to his son Jonathan,⁵ lest you teach them to give the like to their inferiors. *Bless; and curse not*.

Have you given your children up to Christ? bring them up then in his nurture and admonition. It is not enough that you pray with them and for them daily, but you must daily instruct them in the things of God, and in all those things that will be profitable to them. It is observable, that immediately after the laying down of that great truth, *That the Lord our God is one Lord*, and of that great law, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart*, it follows, as an indispensable duty, and a means of keeping up religion in the world, *Thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children*: and look upon it to be one of the most needful pieces of work thou hast to do; more needful to get the knowledge of God for them, than to get estates for them, nay, than to

¹ Jer. x. 25.² Rom. x. 10.³ Isa. i. 3.⁴ Eph. vi. 4.⁵ 1 Thess. ii. 7.⁶ 1 Sam. xx. 30.

get bread for them. Thou shalt therefore not only hear them their catechism once a week, but thou shalt talk freely and familiarly of the truths and laws of God among them, with all gravity and seriousness, *when thou sittest* with them in thy house, and *when thou walkest* with them by the way.^p At night *when thou liest down*, read a portion of Scripture to them, and oblige them to take notice of it; and again in the morning *when thou risest up*; that thus the word of Christ might dwell in them richly. You know they cannot learn Latin, but they must go to school every day; nor learn a trade, but must go to shop every day; and ought they not to have daily instructions out of the word of God, in order to their getting the knowledge of Christ, which is infinitely more excellent?

Take particular care to bring your children acquainted with Jesus Christ, the true treasure hid in the field of the Scriptures; Christ and him crucified, Christ and him glorified. You call the baptizing of your children, the *christening* of them. I wish you would consider it; and think, how little it will avail them to have been christened, if they do not learn Christ, if they be not taught the truth as it is in Jesus.^q Let not your children rest in a mere natural religion; that is *good*, it is necessary, but it is not enough. You must make them sensible of their need of Christ, of their lost and undone condition without him; must endeavour to lead them into the mysteries of our reconciliation to God, and our redemption from sin and wrath, by a Mediator; and O that they may experimentally know him, and the power of his resurrection!

In teaching children the knowledge of God, both the parents are concerned to do their part. Solomon speaks both of the instruction of the father, and the law of the mother;^r but when they are little, the mother has a greater opportunity of instilling into them that which is good, and ought to improve it. Timothy got to know the Holy Scriptures from his childhood, by being brought up under a good mother and grandmother;^s and king Lemuel, when he is come to the throne, forgets not the prophecy that his mother taught him.^t

And as in other accomplishments of your children, so in the business of religion, which is their best and true accomplishment, you must, as they come to be capable, put them on to advance. When they have gone through their learning, you put them into business; when they have served their apprenticeship, you set them up for themselves; and thus when you have brought them to some competent knowledge of Christ, and have some reason to hope that the Spirit of grace has begun a good work in their souls, persuade them to take the covenant of baptism upon themselves, in the use of the other

seal, that of the Lord's supper, and so by their own act and deed to join themselves to the Lord. Tell them, "You brought them to Christ when they were infants, you have been ever since showing them the way to him, and now they must come themselves to him. Though they be weak, if they be willing," you may assure them, "they shall be welcome; for those who come unto him he will not, no, he will not cast them out." If they sit down at his feet to hear his words, he will take them up in his arms, and bless them."

And there is one thing more, in which I must be a monitor, particularly; else I should not be a faithful monitor to parents, who have brought their children to Christ, and who hope that he has blessed them, and that is, that they be careful how they dispose of them in the world when they are grown up, lest by an error here, they undo all that they have been doing for them. In putting them apprentices, placing them in callings, and in marrying them, let Christ be consulted about it; let the interests of the better part be consulted in it. That is best for them which is best for their souls, against which you should not be swayed by any worldly interests or regards whatsoever. If you have laid a good foundation, let it be your care and endeavour that it may be built upon.

(2.) Let this encourage us, who are parents, concerning our children; and enable us to think of them with comfort and hope, in the midst of our cares about them. They are dear to us, we look with pleasure upon these olive plants round about our tables, yet not without a mixture of pain, because children are (as we commonly say) "certain cares, but uncertain comforts;" these arrows in the hand, may prove arrows in the heart;^u Absalom, whose name signifies *The peace of his father*, lived to be his greatest trouble. But when we consider that we have brought them to Christ, and he has received them, we cannot but thank God and take courage. When we *wish* well to them, we would willingly *hope* well; and this is ground of hope, *that our Lord Jesus has expressed so much favour to little children.*

[1.] This may comfort and encourage the tender careful mothers in nursing them, *that they are carrying those in their arms whom Christ has taken up in his.* Not only their *natural affection* to them, as pieces of themselves, may sweeten and ease the pains they take about them; *that makes even the sea monsters draw out their breasts and give suck to their young;*^v but their *gracious affection* to them as members of Christ, as beloved of him, and partakers of benefit^x by him, may much more do it. You are *careful for them with all this care*; they require a constant attendance, and many a time, it may be,

^p Deut. vi. 4—7.

^q Eph. iv. 20, 21.

^r Prov. i. 8.

^s 2 Tim. i. 5.

^t Prov. xxxi. 1.

^u John vi. 37. οὐ μὴ, a double negative.

^v Ps cxvii. 4.

^x Lam. iv. 3.

^y 1 Tim. vi. 1.

break your *sleep*; but if you do it as unto the Lord, if you have an eye to Christ in it, "This I do for a child that is adopted into his family, as well as born into mine;" you may depend upon him to pay you your wages,⁷ though it be your own child. Your care about your little ones keeps you from church, it may be, many a time; and keeps you, that you cannot spend so much time in your closets as you used to do; but if thus it be sanctified by an eye to our Lord Jesus, and by your prayers to God for them as his, more than as your own, you are therein truly serving the Lord Christ yourselves, and not only so, but are breeding up servants for him, that you hope will be vessels of grace and glory.

[2.] *This* may comfort and encourage us if our children labour under any bodily weaknesses and infirmities, if they be unhealthful and often ailing, which is an allay to our comfort in them; let this serve to balance that, *If they belong to Christ, and be blessed of him, they are blessed indeed*; and nothing amiss of that kind shall be any prejudice to their blessedness, or diminution of it, but may, being sanctified, become rather a friend and furtherance to it. Many have been the wiser and better, the more humble and heavenly, for their having borne the yoke of affliction in their youth.⁸ You see what an affection Christ discovered for these children; and may conclude, by reflecting upon yourselves, that he has a particular tenderness for children in affliction; those are commonly most indulged by their parents that are *sickly*; and like as a father pities *those* children,⁹ so does the Lord Jesus much more, as he often evidenced when he was upon earth. As the abiding illnesses of the children are the parents' continual affliction, it is a cross they are to take up daily; so the abiding compassions of Christ toward them, ought to be their continual consolation, and a cordial they may have recourse to daily.

[3.] *This* may comfort and encourage us in teaching and catechising our children, in giving them a pious education, and in praying with them and for them, *that we are doing it for Christ, that we are workers together with him*. And we may hope he will work together with us, and then our labour shall not be in vain. If we have given them to Christ, they shall be taught by his Spirit, and are within the reach of that precious promise, that all shall know God, from the least even to the greatest.^b It may be they are dull and slow, and not so apt to learn as we could wish: Christ's own disciples were so, yet he bore with them, and brought them at last to a *full assurance of understanding*; and therefore despair not concerning your children who are but of a small capacity. It may be your children are hopeful and forward, and very promising; and it is your joy to see it, in hopes they will be ornaments to

your families, but it ought to be much more so, in hopes they will be, in their day, faithful servants to the interest of God's kingdom among men. And what prospect can be more pleasing next to that of our own everlasting bliss, than to have good hope, through grace, that our children shall be praising God on earth, when we are praising him in heaven; and that we and they shall be, together, for ever praising him. *I have no greater joy, says the apostle, than to hear that my children walk in the truth.*

[4.] *This* may comfort and encourage us in all our cares concerning our children when they grow up, in providing for them, and disposing of them. If we have in sincerity given them up to Christ, and he has accepted of them, *we may hope, he will dispose of every thing that concerns them for the best*, and they shall in this world reap the benefit of the promises made to the faithful and their seed,^c and the prayers made by the faithful for their seed. If they be not feasted, yet verily they shall be fed; if we have but little to give them, yet the blessing of Christ upon that little, will make it every way better to them than the riches of many wicked.^d Many, no doubt, have had reason to acknowledge, that their comfortable passage through this world has been very much owing to the blessing of Christ, upon their early dedication to him, and education for him. If Christ has taken up our little ones into his arms, provided they do not by their wickedness throw themselves out of his arms, we may be sure, he is able to keep what we have committed^e to him, through all the attempts of an insnaring world; that he will never drop them, neither shall any pluck them out of his hands.

[5.] *This* may comfort and encourage us, if our children be removed from us by death in their childhood; (this is a common case; that which came forth like a flower, is soon cut down, and the gourd which came up one night, and which we were exceeding glad of, withers the next night, and leaves us in tears. Now it is enough to SILENCE us in such a case, that it is the Lord that gave, and the Lord that taketh away, and if he takes away who can hinder him? May he not do what he will with his own? Let Aaron therefore hold his peace,^f for God is glorified. But *this* goes further, and may SATISFY us;) *that if Christ has owned them in the kingdom of his grace, he will receive them into the kingdom of his glory*. We are indeed kept in the dark concerning the state of those that die in infancy, they are left to the mercy of God; but the children who are given up to Christ by their believing parents, are not left to uncovenanted mercy. *The Lord knows them that are his*, though we do not; but we may hope that it shall go well with those whom Christ has taken up in his arms,

⁷ Exod. ii. 9.

^a Ps. ciii. 13.

⁸ Lam. iii. 27.

^b Heb. viii. 11.

^c Ps. xxxvii. 25, 26.

^d John x. 28.

^e Ps. xxxvii. 3, 16.

^f Lev. x. 3.

and blessed ; and, that he was so well pleased with the children's Hosannas, even in the Old Jerusalem, will reckon himself glorified by their *Hallelujahs* in the New Jerusalem.^c

[6.] *This* may comfort and encourage us if we should be taken away from our children by death, while they are little : (this also is a common case, and a mournful one ; we know not how soon we may fall under the arrests of death, and may see the day, that awful day, approaching, which will cut off the number of our months in the midst. In such a case, as to our own souls, we may perhaps be able to say, as our Master did, with an air of triumph, "Now we are no more in this world."^b O that we may be able, at such a time, with this cheerfulness, to say so ! But, though we should, yet, like him concerning his disciples, we must say concerning our children, *But THESE are in the world :*) How shall we leave them ? Where and with whom shall we leave them ? With whom, but with him who has said, *Leave thy fatherless children with me, I will preserve them alive, and let thy widows trust in me ;*^d who has taken it among the titles of his honour, to be a *Father of the fatherless*, and a *Judge of the widows*.^e If we have made Christ guardian to our children, let us make it appear we are entirely well satisfied in his wisdom and faithfulness.

But, [7, & ult.] *What* may we have to comfort and encourage us, if our children should prove wicked and vile ; if they should forsake their God, and the God of their fathers, and walk in the paths of the destroyer, notwithstanding our utmost endeavours to engage them for Christ ? It is very often a case in fact ; we cannot deny it ; it is possible the best parents may have the worst children ; yet if we SHOULD SUPPOSE a falling from *grace and holiness adherent*, which, through the divine condescension and compassion, might have availed to the salvation of such as die in infancy, that WILL NOT INFER a falling from *grace and holiness inherent* : what Christ does *herein*, we know not now, but we shall know hereafter.^f But disputes in this case are cold com-

forts to the poor parents ; whose hearts bleed and break to see the destructive courses which their children take, whom they thought they had lodged safe in the hands of the Mediator, for whom they have prayed many a prayer, and shed many a tear. They thought Christ had taken them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them, but it does not prove so. What shall we say to comfort such ?

It may be some satisfaction to them, that however it goes with their children, Christ will be glorified ; if they do not give honour to him, he will get him honour upon them. And if God be sanctified we ought to be satisfied, and with reverence to behold both the goodness and severity of God ; on them which fall, severity ; but towards them who stand, goodness, if they continue in his goodness.^g

But it will be yet *more* satisfaction to them, if they have the testimony of their consciences for them that they have done their duty ; which they did, with a resolution to leave the event with God. They knew they could not give grace to their children ; but their hearts can witness for them, that to the best of their power, they digged about these barren trees, and dunged them,^h as the dresser of the vineyard did ; and if they bring forth fruit well, they shall have the comfort, and God the glory ; but if not, they must be content to see them cut down, and though they cannot have comfort in that, yet God will have glory, and they acquiesce.

But the greatest comfort of all in such a case is, that the unbelief and disobedience of their children shall not make void God's promise to them, and therefore ought not to make void their comfort in God. *Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious.*ⁱ Abraham is happy in heaven, though there be those in hell who can call Abraham father. It was the comfort of holy David, though he saw a great deal of sin and trouble in his family, *Although my house be not so with God* as I could wish it, yet I am sure of this, *he has made with me an everlasting covenant, which is well ordered in all things and sure, and that is all my salvation*, and therefore shall be *all my desire*.^j

^c Matt. xxi. 15, 16.
^d Ps. lxxviii. 5.

^e John xvii. 11.

^f Jer. xlix. 11.
^g 1 John xiii. 17.

^h Rom. xi. 22.
ⁱ Isa. xlix. 5.

^j Luke xiii. 8, 9.
^k 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.