

THE
WHOLE WORKS
OF THE
REV. OLIVER HEYWOOD, B. A.

NOW FIRST COLLECTED, REVISED, AND ARRANGED,

*Including some Tracts extremely scarce, and others from
unpublished Manuscripts :*

WITH

MEMOIRS OF HIS LIFE.

IN FIVE VOLUMES.

VOLUME THE THIRD,

CONTAINING

CLOSET PRAYER.
INTERCESSION OF CHRIST.
LIFE IN GOD'S FAVOUR.

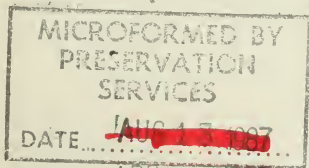
ISRAEL'S LAMENTATION AF-
TER THE LORD.
JOB'S APPEAL.

IDLE :

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CLOSET PRAYER,

A

Christian Duty.

EPISTLE

TO THE READER,

Especially to the strict and serious Professor of Christianity.

CHRISTIAN FRIEND,

THE power of godliness is much spoken of, but I am afraid very rarely to be found, even amongst celebrated professors: most content themselves with external visible duties, which formalists may carry on with as much seeming zeal and applause as sincere worshippers. A formal spirit is the disease of the present day: the beams of gospel light in the late noon-tide dispensations, have so far produced an assent to fundamental truths, and the necessity of some practical duties, that it is a shame in some places not to have a form of godliness. Many will be found in the day of accounts orthodox in their judgments, and externally conformable in their practices, yet without a principle of grace in their hearts, or the power of religion in their lives: witness the foolish Virgins. Thousands do finally miscarry besides the grossly profane. Some go to hell with a candle in their hand, Christ's colours in their hats, his word in their mouths, and having the habit of religion: every one is not a saint that looks like one; a well-executed picture makes a fair show, but wants life: a formalist would be amiable indeed, if animated with the truth of grace: but the leaven of hypocrisy spoils many good duties: this was that leaven of the Pharisees, that soured their prayers, and rendered them distasteful to God: they made religious duties a stage to act their vain-glory upon, their prayers had a thick shell and little kernel. Our Saviour would not have his people like them, Christ's disciples must do some singular thing, more than others; their righteousness must go beyond that of the Scribes and Pharisees: sincerity is the spirit and life which is to run through religion, else it is a body with-

out a soul, or clothes without the man: this is the chief drift of our Saviour's teaching, and main design of gospel commands, to render professors sincere and spiritual, approving their hearts to God in evangelical performances. I have many times bewailed the condition of those who are very busy in externals of religion abroad, and are grossly negligent of the main essentials at home. They are like those who are propping up some remote members of their body, while their vitals are wasting in a languishing consumption: they are like a man in a fever, his face and hands burn, but his heart shakes and quivers for cold: these I may call pepper-professors, hot in the mouth, but cold at the stomach: there are thousands in the world will run many miles to hear a sermon, will countenance the best preachers, will read the Scriptures and good books, will pray in their families, yea keep days of fasting and prayer with others, that yet will not set about heart-work and flesh-displeasing duties, in mortifying beloved lusts, loving, forgiving and praying for enemies,—yea, that will not set themselves solemnly to the duties of meditation, self-examination, and secret prayer; the vessel will not stir except the wind of applause fill the sails; these are like the nightingale in the wood, of which it is recorded, that she sings most sweetly when she thinks any is near her. An hypocrite can pray best when taken notice of by men, you shall seldom see him at work with his heart in a closet: he is of the mind of those carnal persons of Christ's natural kindred, John. vii. 4, who said to Christ, "If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world, for, (saith the text, ver. 5.) neither did his brethren believe in him;" as if he had said, such as perform duties for ostentation, or counsel others to such undertakings as may expose them to public view, declare plainly they want true grace, which makes persons Jews inwardly, "whose circumcision is of the heart, in the spirit, whose praise is not of men, but of God," Rom. ii. 29. The main trade of a Christian is his home-trade, as one saith, which is spent in secret betwixt God and his own soul: here he drives an unknown trade, he is at heaven and home again, richly laden in his thoughts with heavenly meditations before the world knows where he hath been.*

The consideration of these things hath engaged me to spend

* Gurnal's Christian Armour, ch. 12. sec. 3. p. 394.

some thoughts on this great and much neglected duty of Closet Prayer; which when I had delivered, and several had got copies thereof, it was judged fit for the press. Some hopes being conceived of its further usefulness, I perused it again and methodized it into this form, and communicated my thoughts to a few concerning the publication of it. A friend informed me that there was a book extant upon the same subject, which I inquired after, and found one of Mr. Brooks' on the same text: that book I looked over, and was ready to think it would save me a labour; but, upon second thoughts, I considered that this might fall into some hands which that would not; that several men writing on the same subject may be useful, and that our method and most of our matter, are different; for I had finished mine before I saw the other, except two or three leaves at the close: besides that, the other is large, this a small piece, and more portable as a pocket book, or vade mecum: let it be then a short Appendix to that excellent piece.

I am heartily glad any of God's servants have set themselves to promote this part of practical piety; it is an excellent design, and I am well assured if Christians were more in their closets with God, their own souls would thrive better, and things would succeed better abroad; Mr. Rogers being silenced from public work, desired his hearers to spend that time they were wont to pass at his lecture in serious prayer and meditation in their closets, and he was confident Satan would be a loser, and their souls gainers by that providence: and this I can affirm, that if persons would spend part of that time in secret prayer they take to run abroad to sermons, they would be better proficients; not but that hearing the word is necessary, and so is this; nor must the one jostle out the other; yea, these secret duties help us to profit by public ordinances. If dung be poured down in heaps in the field it doth no good, it must be spread abroad before it make fruitful ground; the plaister heals not, except it be applied: so the word must be spread on our hearts by serious and secret meditation and application, or else it will never make our souls healthful and fruitful; and then we must pray over it for the showers of divine grace to wash it and work it into our hearts; many sermons are lost for want of people taking them home to their closets, and turning them into prayer. I fear

all will be little enough that ministers can preach or write upon this theme; I doubt still, this exercise will be either totally neglected or negligently performed; it is a difficult exercise, the spirit must travail in it, and, saith good Mr. Bains, the saints can endure better to hear an hour than to pray a quarter: yea, our trifling hearts will make any excuse to evade this duty, or shuffle it off, even though it be in exchange for another, a sign the work is of God, and tending much to the soul's good, or else Satan and our corrupt hearts would never so much hinder or oppose it.

Poor soul, it may be thou lookest abroad, and seest much wickedness committed, holiness persecuted, thy God dishonoured, many things out of order, and thou wantest a capacity to bring a remedy: I must therefore say to thee as it is reported Albertus Crantzius said to Luther, when he began to oppose the Pope,* Brother, go into thy cell, and say, God be merciful unto me; so say I. Alas, thy interest and influence reacheth but a little way to reform a wicked world, though thou shouldst seek to proceed as far as thy place and calling extend; but go thy way to God in thy closet, bewail thy sins, and the sins of others; plead with God for thine own soul; busy thyself about thyself, set all straight at home, take heed of that of which the poor church complains, Cant. i. 6, "They made me the keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept." Oh leave other things undone, rather than this great matter, which concerns the affairs of thine own soul.

Mr. Fox tells us of one Peter Moyce, a German martyr,† that being called before the synod at Dornick, they began to examine him on certain articles of religion, and when he was about to answer boldly and expressly on every point, they interrupting him, bade him say in one word, either yea or nay. Then said he, if you will not suffer me to answer for myself in things of such importance, send me to my prison again among my toads and frogs, which will not interrupt me while I address my Lord and my God. O Christian, the time may come, or is already come, when men may stop thy mouth, and will not suffer thee to witness a good confession; withdraw thyself from

* Frater, vade in cellam, et dic, Miserere mei, Deus.

† Acts Mon. 2 vol. lib. 8. fol. 122.

men, and retire unto thy God, who will make thee freely welcome, to pour out thy soul to him in secret: he will neither shut thy mouth, nor stop his ear; he bids thee open thy mouth wide, Psal. lxxxi. 10. and he tells thee, his ear is open to thy cry, Psal. xxxiv. 15. Thou canst not ask such great things as he can and will give, only see thou beest a child of God. Naturalists tell of a precious stone, of an excellent virtue, which loseth all its efficacy when it is put into a dead man's mouth: so prayer in the lips of a saint or a righteous man, availeth much; but the prayer of the wicked is not only ineffectual, but abominable to God. See to your state, and then see that you pray aright, for manner, matter, and end; many ask and receive not, because they ask amiss: above all, my reader, in thy secret addresses to God, take heed of a trifling spirit; thou wilt find most ado with thyself herein; our giddy spirits are loth to be pent up in the narrow room of a spiritual performance; we love to take our liberty in ranging abroad to a thousand objects; but Christian, as thou lovest thy peace, thy soul, thy God, look to thy spirit in secret prayer; do not trifle away thy time upon thy knees, let not thy words freeze as they come from thee, let no discouragements beat thee off: the woman of Canaan, as one saith, takes the bullets that Christ shot at her, and with an humble boldness of faith, sends them back again in prayer; which indeed reached his heart, and prevailed with God for mercy.

However, I shall enlarge no more at present, but refer thee to this small treatise, wherewith I have, according to my poor talent, laid before thee this great duty; what effect it may have I know not, my God knows, in whose hands the blessing of our endeavours lies; get alone and pray over this book, and for the unworthy sinful author, as he desires to do for thee into whose hands this may come; let our prayers daily meet at the throne of grace till our souls meet before the throne of God; if thou receivest any good by this or any other work this poor worm hath handed to thee, ascribe nothing to the instrument, but all to the agent, and efficient, our good God from whom comes every good and perfect gift: disdain not the work for the plainness of the style; it was purposely put in this dress for the general benefit; and if it or myself be exposed to censure for that,

it is welcome. I write not to please learned scholars, but to profit plain Christians; whose spiritual good I prefer above any credit to myself. I am sure there is none due: there being few of my brethren but they transcend me in parts and learning, but by the grace of God I am what I am, 1 Cor. xv. 10. Nor is his grace altogether in vain: for as he hath helped me in labours, so he hath in some measure blessed my labours, though I be nothing, the least of saints, not meet to be called a minister. Did those that read my performances know me, they would be ready to despise them? this I speak because my former book hath found such good acceptance, and this is so much desired. And that no man may think of me, above what he knoweth to be in me, I shall add, my heart hath been near fainting through discouragements from my great weakness, had I not been supported many a time with that word, 2 Cor. iv. 7, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of man." Whence I gather, that God can make use of weak, unlearned, sinful instruments to do great things; and he can use persons of mean abilities to accomplish his glorious purpose, in converting souls, as well as the profoundest clerks, or wisest men on earth: yea, sometimes he layeth aside these, and rather useth the former, that all the glory may be his, "and that no flesh may glory in his presence," 1 Cor. i. 29. But such as I am, or have, is all devoted to the honour of our Redeemer, and the welfare of souls,

Whilst I am,

Oct. 31, 1668.

OLIVER HEYWOOD.

CLOSET PRAYER.

MATTH. VI. 6.

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

CHAP. I.

INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS.

SECTION I.

The Context examined.

IN this excellent Sermon of our precious Saviour, on the Mount, we have both the gospel clearly proposed, and the law solidly expounded. The corrupt and carnal Pharisees had degraded God's holy law from its spiritual extent and control* by their low and literal glosses, but our Saviour restores it to its dignity and authority over the hearts and consciences of men.

In this chapter, the best preacher that ever opened his mouth, doth admirably explain the adjuncts, offices, and exercises of true piety; which are, principally, three—alms, prayer, and fasting; ver. 1—19.

Particularly, concerning the duty of prayer, there

* The Author's word here is "regiment," which, in the works of Hooker, frequently occurs in this sense.

were two materially dangerous faults, of which the Scribes and Pharisees were guilty, in that delightful and solemn exercise. Those were, 1. Hypocrisy, 2. Battology, or vain repetition. Jesus Christ rebukes and rectifies both.

1. They were wont to perform their private devotions in public places, merely for vain-glory, to be seen of men, as in the synagogues, or in the streets, ver. 5. Now for the disciples' practice in this case, he commands them to withdraw themselves out of the view of men, into some solitary place, and there perform that duty, where they would be least exposed to the danger of ostentation, ver. 6.

2. Another fault that our Redeemer rebukes in the duty of prayer is, vain repetition. And though he only mentions it here as the heathens' fault, verse 7, yet certainly the Scribes and Pharisees, who are censured for their long prayers, Matt. xxiii. 14, might also be guilty of it, but in different circumstances. Here the heathens use vain repetitions that they may move God; there the Scribes and Pharisees make long prayers that they may deceive men, and devour widows' houses. The text saith, "They think they shall be heard for their much speaking;" just as Baal's priests, 1 Kings xviii. 26, "They called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon, saying, O Baal hear us! they leaped upon the altar, and cried aloud, and cut themselves with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them." No doubt this was done to move their cruel god, or rather stupid block, to some pity and compassion, just as the frantic Papists do at this day in their self-tormenting penances; but our God, who is the searcher of hearts, delights more in ardent affections, than in either extension of the voice or multiplication of words, or excruciating afflictions of the outward man; there-

fore, our Saviour tells us, that when we pray, we come not to inform God of any thing he is ignorant of, ver. 8, "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him;" but we pray that our own hearts may be affected, and that we may have the condition of acceptance—and for the rectifying of this abuse of vain babbling in prayer, Christ proposes and presents to us an exact draught and compendious platform of prayer, in what is commonly called, "The Lord's Prayer;" not as though men should say only those words and no more, for then the apostles had failed in praying in other terms, but that this might be a directory for prayer; so that every thing we ask should be reducible to some of those heads mentioned in this perfect platform; so that, as Cyprian saith,* "to pray otherwise than he hath taught, either as to the manner or substance of the matter, is not only ignorance but an offence; and indeed we cannot expect to be heard except we ask, as well according to Christ's mind as in his name." But this is not the subject I have chosen to insist upon; that which falls under our present cognizance from this text, is,

The modification of prayer, with respect to the circumstances of privacy, solitariness, or retirement.

The text holds forth the warrant for, and manner of carrying on the great duty of closet prayer—a copious subject, a precious exercise, in which are,

1. The place for it, "Thy closet."
2. The closeness of the place, "Thy door being shut."
3. The object of worship, "Thy Father."
4. The arguments to enforce thy duty.
 - (1.) God's omniscience, "He sees."
 - (2.) His munificence, "Will reward."

* Ut aliter orare quàm docuit, non ignorantia sola est sed et culpa.—Cyp. *Serm. ad Orat. Domin.* p. 408.

SECTION II.

The Words explained.

FOR a more distinct explanation of the words according to the parts before-mentioned, consider,

1. What is meant by a *closet* here. Some understand and interpret it, not literally but mystically, making an allegory of it, as though it did import, *interiorem cordis recessum*, the inner recesses or emotions of the heart; but though it be a truth and a duty that we must pray in the closet of the heart, yet I humbly conceive, this is not the proper meaning of the place, for we need not interpret this plain word in such a figurative sense, since multitudes of Scriptures are so express for worshipping God with the heart; besides, that is not suitable to the scope of the place, which opposeth self-retirement to the Pharisaical modes of devotion. The word then, is to be literally taken, and, in general, imports “any secret place,”* where a thing is laid up; particularly, it signifies a safe or cupboard, to lay victuals in, or a chest locked up, wherein a treasure is usually reserved, or it is taken, as indeed here and often elsewhere, for a close or secret chamber, a withdrawing room, retiring place, where a person is not seen or heard, nor yet is disturbed in his devotions by any noise or commotion; a secret conclave or apartment locked up where no company is admitted.

2. *Shut thy door.* This word imports yet a further degree of secrecy, as if he had said, that thou mayest make thyself to be less observed, shut up thyself in a room; let none come at thee to disturb thee in thy in-

* Leigh. in Crit. Sac. in verb. Matt. xxiv. 26. Luke xii. 3. Quemvis locum occultum notat.—*Par.*

tercourse with God, bar the door, and make it fast ; yea let none overhear thee in thy retired devotions ; for, observe it, in true closet prayer there should be a confinement of the voice as well as the body. Some pray so loud in their chambers that they may be heard into the streets. This is not properly closet prayer, since it doth not attain the end of this retirement, which is an approving the heart only to God, and avoiding all shew and occasions of hypocrisy and vain-glory ; for it is all one in this respect, whether the body be seen or the voice be heard. Only remember, this is spoken of secret prayer ; for it doth not exclude public prayer in a congregation, where the body is seen and voice is heard ; yet it doth by a sort of synecdoche require self-denial, singleness and sincerity in every kind of prayer, public, private, and secret ; for one part or sign of uprightness in the duty is put for the whole, shutting the door, for integrity of heart in the whole* management of this important exercise.

3. Here is the object of prayer, *pray to thy Father*. Thy business is not with men, but with God ; seek, therefore, to please and enjoy him. Nor yet art thou to fetch a compass and pray to saints and angels, but go straight to God in the name of Christ, and be sure thou look upon him as under the delightful relation of a tender Father, yea, “thy Father.” O, a sweet word, a blessed word, and such a word as we durst not have taken into our mouths ;† had it not been for Christ’s glorious undertaking to procure adoption for us, and his gracious encouragement in the prescribed form of prayer, and also for God the Father’s voluntary

* Una specie simplicitatis pro toto genere positâ.

† Quod nomen, nemo nostrum in oratione auderet attingere, nisi ipse nobis sic permisisset orare.—*Cyprian Serm. de Orat. Dom.* page 414.

condescension. Come then, and fear not, poor disciple of Christ, come with filial affections, and the spirit of adoption, and thou art sure to speed, for this paternal relation imports affection, provision, condescension and compassion. If thou wilt be a child to him, he will be a Father to thee.—2 Cor. vi. 18.

4. Here are the arguments and encouragements to this duty of secret prayer.

(1.) *Thy Father sees in secret.* All is one to him whether you be in a public church or private closet; God, whose eyes are ten thousand times brighter than the sun, sees you in the one place, as well as in the other, and though men see you not, yet content yourselves with this consideration, that your own consciences and God, with whom you have to do, and from whom you have your reward, are competent witnesses of your uprightness.

(2.) *He will reward thee openly.* There are two things in this expression. First, they shall be rewarded; and secondly, they shall be openly rewarded. "So that men shall say, verily there is a reward for the righteous, verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth," Psalm lviii. 11. The Scribes and Pharisees do all their works to be seen of men, and of men they have that sorry reward: you do yours in the sight of God, and from him you shall receive your abundant and eternal recompense. Though men see you not, fear not, you shall be seen and accepted by him that searcheth hearts, and knoweth the mind of the Spirit. But of these, more anon.

The sum and design of the text is this. Thou, my disciple, seest the plausible practices of the hypocritical Pharisees, to gain credit and applause; they perform their private duties in public places, as markets and synagogues, that they may pass among men for

eminent saints, and they are generally so esteemed ; that is their reward. But thou that hast given up thy name to me, in the profession of my name, take my counsel for regulating this important duty of secret prayer : let none see what thou goest about, steal time from all observers, withdraw thyself into some closet or private place, and when thou hast made all fast, set thyself in the presence of God, approve thy heart to him, lay open thy bosom before him, tell him all thy grievances ; and though no creature is privy to thy secret groans, yet be assured that all thy desires are before God, and thy groaning is not hid from him, that he takes notice of thy tears, and reserves them in a bottle by him, to be rewarded in a visible manner in a seasonable time ; thy labour is not in vain, thy work is with the Lord, and thy reward with thy God.

SECTION III.

Doctrines suggested.

MANY doctrines lie couched in the words, I shall but suggest them, and select one :

1. Prayer is a choice part of religion ; it holds a conspicuous place in the natural worship of the supreme Being, though the right ordering of it is by institution. It is a prominent feature in a pious character, and therefore often put in Scripture for the whole service of God : "He that calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved," Rom. x. 13. A prayerless soul is graceless.

2. Prayer is a duty much abused. There is scarcely any thing so much perverted and corrupted as this sacred duty, by formality, hypocrisy, superstition, base and bye-ends, as is shown by those Pharisees many

ways, and their younger brethren the Papists at this day, in masses, dirges, invocation of saints, &c.

3. There are several sorts of prayer, occasioned by different modes and circumstances. The apostle distinguisheth supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, 1 Tim. ii. 1. There are also public prayer, family prayer, and closet prayer; now a Christian must pray with all prayer and supplication, Eph. vi. 18. The last is here insisted on.

4. A Christian must do nothing for praise or applause, especially in matters of religion. It is a base prostituting of the highest things of God to our ambition. It is to feed a humour, and ruin the soul with that which should save it. Let no Christians, as the Pharisees here, make prayer truckle to their credit, Phil. ii. 3, "Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory."

5. There are set and stated times of prayer. This is hinted in this phrase, *When thou prayest*. A time there must be for it, though the point of time is not determined, yet a time must be set apart for the duty, every day; a Christian must choose out the fittest season for the duty, by properly employing his liberty and discretion.

6. Circumstances are of great consideration in all our actions. The streets are proper places to walk, talk, buy, and sell in, but not so fit for prayer; the church is a fit place for public devotion, not so for a solemn performance of the duty of secret prayer. Although mental ejaculations are fit enough in both, yet it is not convenient to kneel down or use outward gestures of secret prayer there.

7. Closet prayer must be with all secrecy and solitariness—in a closet, with the door shut; as we must not blow a trumpet when we give alms, so we must

not hold out a flag when we go to wait on God in the duty of prayer. It was carnal counsel, the brethren of Christ gave him, John vii. 4, "Shew thyself to the world." The reason is given, ver. 5, "For neither did his brethren believe in him:" a sad sign of carnality!

8. God alone is the proper object of our prayers—*pray to thy Father*. As he is the object of our faith, so of prayer: for he alone can help, therefore he is to be sought, none else sees our state, or can satisfy souls, Isa. lxiii. 16, "Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us."

9. In all our addresses to God we must own God as our Father, as having adopted us in Christ; because his, therefore ours. "I ascend (saith Christ) to my Father and your Father," John xx. 17. Indeed by nature we were children of wrath, but by grace children of his love; so that we may say, "But now, O Lord, thou art our Father."* O plead and improve this relation.

10. God is omnipresent—*thy Father which is in secret*: the heaven of heavens cannot contain him, 1 Kings, viii. 27. He filleth all places with his immense and infinite essence: heaven is his throne, the earth is his footstool; he is excluded from no place, included in none; for he is without all limitation or dimension.†

11. God is omniscient—*Thy Father which seeth in secret*. The darkest night, or secretest closet, or most hidden thought of a reserved heart, can neither hide nor be hidden from God's all-seeing eye.—Heb. iv. 13. God beholds all things in heaven and on earth with one simple, single act of his understanding.

* Isa. lxiv. 8.

† Hinc omnipræsens est quia nullum est ubi unde est exclusus, neque alicubi est inclusus.—*Ames. Med. Theol. lib. 1, cap 4, 47.*

12. Every believing prayer hath a sure reward—*he will reward thee openly*: not a good word addressed to God, or good work for God, shall be lost: “To him that soweth righteousness, shall be a sure reward,” Prov. xi. 18. And we know every right prayer is real seed, Psal. cxxvi. 6, and it will rise in a full and plentiful crop another day.

13. The reward of secret prayer shall be open and manifest. There is previously a reward or gift in secret; communion with God is an abundant recompense. “In keeping thy commandments there is great reward,” Psal. xix. 11. But this is a (*præmium ante præmium*) reward before the reward: the other shall be in heaven, before angels and men.

14. A Christian’s reward is from God—*thy Father will reward thee*, not men. Scribes and Pharisees have their reward from men, from men they expect it: saints expect their reward from God, and God gives it them: men reward them evil for their good will, and they expect no better: if better comes from men, they own it as a gratuity sent from their Father: it is a principle of religion to know and “believe that God is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”—Heb. xi. 6. And as God gives a reward, so he is the reward of his saints, Gen. xv. 1, “Yea, an exceeding great reward.” It can admit of no hyperbole, it cannot have a sufficient emphasis: to enjoy God is a reward sufficient, in and for the service of God. These doctrines would require large discourses, but none of these are the subject on which I shall insist.

I shall raise only one doctrine from the main scope of the text, namely—

That closet prayer is a christian duty.

Secret prayer is an evangelical exercise.

Every child of God may and must perform the duty of secret prayer.

As a Christian must pray all manner of prayer, so in all places, 1 Tim. ii. 8, "I will that men pray every where;" and if every where, then in their closets. This divine incense should perfume every room, and should ascend to heaven from chambers as well as churches: any place now is fit for a divine oratory; God and a believing soul may meet in a corner: a saint should give himself to prayer, and dedicate his house to God;* he should, as it were, consecrate every room in his house to be a place of private devotion. Abraham reared an altar to God wherever he came, so must a Christian make every place wherever he can get close to the duty, a place of prayer.

Mr. Mede hath undertaken to prove, from Josh. xxiv. 26, that the Jews of old, as well as Christians in gospel times had their *proseuchæ*, or praying places, which he thus describes,† as to the Jews of old: "a *proseucha*," saith he, "was a plot of ground, encompassed with a wall, or some other similar fence or inclosure, and open above, much like to our courts, the use being properly for prayer, as the name *proseucha* imports: and these were without the cities, as synagogues were within:" of this, as he thinks, was that mentioned Acts xvi. 13, and also that, Luke vi. 12, where Jesus Christ is said to continue all night, *ἐν τῇ προσευχῇ τῆς ὥρας*, *in proseucha Dei*, in the place of prayer, or *proseucha* of God. Now although I shall say little on the notion, yet I cannot see how it will prove any relative holiness of places; nor yet do I believe or find, but that the saints had other praying places, as in houses and elsewhere as occasion offered, even in dwelling-houses, Acts xii. 12. But as to this duty of secret prayer, it

* Psalm cix. 4. Psalm xxx. title † Mede's Diatribe, page 279.

must not be so narrowly confined, but we may go into any closet or private room where our souls may meet with God: and, as one saith, we shall not fail to find that the grots and caves lie as open to the celestial influences, as the fairest and most beautiful temples.*

SECTION IV.

Several instances in Scripture of closet prayer.

THE doctrine needs not explication, but confirmation; which I shall furnish from Scripture instances and reasons.

We have several examples of patriarchs, prophets, and apostles that practised this duty of solitary or secret prayer.

1. ABRAHAM, the friend of God, and father of the faithful, conversed much with his God alone; particularly in this duty of prayer, Gen. xviii. 22. When the men, that is, the created angels that seemed men, were gone towards Sodom—"Abraham stood yet before the Lord," or Jehovah, that is, Jesus Christ, the Angel of the covenant. Standing is a praying posture, therefore put for prayer; hence, Abraham drew near and pleaded with God for Sodom: that was his errand to God at that time. No doubt he had used this course frequently in other cases: hence arose that intimacy betwixt God and Abraham:† so that God talked with him, came to him, and he again discoursed familiarly with God.

2. ISAAC, the son of the promise, a very contemplative man, therefore it is said, Gen. xxiv. 63, that "Isaac

* The Life of Dr. Hammond, in a Letter, p. 201.

† Gen. xv. 8—13. xvii. 3.

went out to meditate in the field at even-tide." The word signifies as well to pray as meditate;* it is likely he did both in some solitary walk, where he conversed with his God. The Chaldee translates it by praying, but the Greek by exercising himself, that is, both in meditation and prayer: and truly there is a near affinity betwixt these two solemn, yet pleasant duties, and it is usual for a devout soul to pass out of the one into the other, in its retirements. Soliloquy in the heart, helps to a colloquy with God: but here observe Isaac's oratory, which he had in the field, and which he used for more privacy; "There," saith Pareus,† "he constantly poured out prayers to God, and at this time more earnestly for the happy success of his servant—a singular example of piety: a place it was, every way fit for prayer, especially in solitude where the senses are less drawn off from pious meditations." Some think he was returning from his devotions, and then it is worth noticing, what a speedy reward of his piety, and effect of his prayers was granted: would all young men take the like course for a wife, they might meet seasonably with a Rebecca in mercy.

3. JACOB is a famous instance of this choice exercise, few like him; he was made to flee, but he could not be driven from his God: they had their meeting-places and intercourse where none saw, particularly that remarkable time, Gen. xxxii. 24, "Jacob was left alone: and there wrestled a man with him, until the breaking of the day." It is likely Jacob had sent his household away on purpose, that he might wrestle with God alone. I shall not dispute whether Jacob had any extraordi-

* שׁוּחַ Locutus est ore, vel corde cogitavit; proprie significat, submissa voce loqui, ut orantes.—*Leigh*.

† Locus precibus ubique commodus; maxime in solitudine, ubi sensus de piis meditationibus minus avocantur.—*Pareus in loc.*

nary natural strength of body, I am sure he had abundance of spiritual strength of grace, nor shall I take notice of the Hebrews' subtle disputes concerning this man. Hosea tells us it was an angel, yet withal he tells us, "that by his strength he had power with God," Hos. xii. 3, 4. Therefore this was God himself, the creating, not a created angel, even Jesus Christ, the angel that redeemed him from all evil,* whom Malachi calls, "the angel of the covenant," Mal. iii. 1. It was God himself, *Elohim*, whom Jacob overcame in this stupendous *monomachia*, or conflict. But how did he thus prevail? The text saith, with prayers and tears, he wept and made supplication: now he had gotten God to a side, as it were, and none came to distract him, or to part this strong and blessed duel: he is resolved to make good his hold, and not let God go, till he blessed him: the consequence was that good Jacob came off a noble conqueror, and from that procured the famous name of Israel. O unequal match! O unparalleled conquest! The seemingly adverse combatant was Jacob's only assistant, and the conquered was the invincible Jehovah, and no seconds or spectators, but the infinite God, and worm Jacob.

4. MOSES was an excellent man of God, whom the Scripture characterizeth as a *non-such*, Deut. xxxiv. 10. "There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face:" and this intimate acquaintance was obtained, maintained, and cherished by this secret conversing with God: how often do we find the Lord and his servant Moses together and none with them? yea, Moses only must come near, and the rest must worship afar off:† and what business have these familiar friends with each other? Why, sometimes the Lord speaks to Moses,

* Gen. xlviii. 16.

† Exodus xxiv. 12.

sometimes Moses speaks to God in secret prayer : see both together in Exod. xxxii. 9—11. A strange scripture—God and Moses had been conversing with each other in the mount forty days : God tells Moses, the people had made them a molten calf, and he was angry and would consume them, and bids Moses let him alone, as though Moses had bound the hands of omnipotence : nay then, thinks Moses, if my poor people be in this hazard since I am with God, I will ply the throne of grace, and improve my interest for them : and then he falls close to the work, he besought the Lord his God, and supplicated mercy for the people. At this time he alone stood in the gap, and prevailed by his intercession to turn away God's wrath from Israel :* here was a deliverance, and this was the fruit of secret prayer.

5. DAVID, the man after God's own heart, was a man much skilled in secret or closet meditations and prayer : hence some of his Psalms of prayer and praise were first composed in caves, wildernesses, and solitary places, Psalm cxlii. the title is, "Maschil of David, a prayer when he was in the cave," and this is for instruction to us, so *Maschil* signifies : yea, he purposely compiles the cii. Psalm, as a pattern to all that may be in his case, that is, solitary, "As a pelican in the wilderness, an owl in the desert, or a sparrow alone upon the house-top," ver. 6, 7. Then they are to pray as he did, and to pour out their complaint before the Lord : yea, upon a declaration of God's covenant, or designs of mercy to David and his house, the good man went either into some private room in his own house, or into the tent before the ark, and there set himself, first to meditate, then to pray ; for he did both, as that scripture clearly intimates, 2 Sam. vii. 17—27.

* Psalm cvi. 23.

And O what memorable fruits of secret prayer had David frequently? Surely he felt the sweetness of it, both in his soul and body, in his spiritual estate, and political affairs; therefore he commends it to all, Psalm iv. 4, 5, "Commune with your own heart upon your bed," (or in your bed-chamber) and there also "offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord."

6. Another example from Scripture of the performance of this duty of secret prayer, is, the celebrated man of God ELIJAH, who wrought many miracles, and was mighty in prayer, for so the apostle James testifies of him, chap. v. 17, 18, that he could shut and open heaven; he had, as it were, got the key of the clouds, to open the windows of heaven, that it might rain or not rain, according to his word. But how came he by this power? Why, certainly he had much intercourse with his God in secret. Take one instance what his practice was, 1 Kings xvii. 19—24. It is the memorable history of raising the widow woman's dead son. It was a great undertaking: none but God could raise the dead; God is to be implored by earnest prayer, no place so fit for that great duty as a closet, or some close chamber; therefore he being to deal with his God in extreme good earnest about this important business, saith the text, "He carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed, and then he cried to the Lord," ver. 19, 20. It was not the first time Elijah had there wrestled with God; if it was his lodging room, it was his praying room, and here God heard him, and wrought the miracle: what he did for Elijah, he can and will do for us, if he see fit; for Elijah was no more than a man, and subject to like passions as we are.

7. JEREMIAH is a remarkable instance: he was a

Prophet of the Lord, sanctified from his mother's womb, yet he met with so many discouragements, that he hath a mind to leave his people, and he wisheth for a lodging-place in the wilderness,* that is, some solitary retirement, that there he might take his fill of weeping; however he resolved at present, that wherever he is, he will retire, and, saith he, "My soul shall weep in secret places for your pride."—Jer. xiii. 17. Yet more appropriately to the business of secret prayer, see Jer. xv. 17, where he saith, "I sat alone because of thy hand." But what did he alone? Did he only pore and muse upon the church's sins and sufferings? No, he had something to say to his God, v. 18. "Why is my pain perpetual?" And God then hath something to say to him by way of gracious answer, v. 19, "If thou return, then will I bring thee again, and thou shalt stand before me:" this is the result of his secret prayer, a restoration of him to, and his confirmation in, his office and function, and to the public exercise thereof: this is worth praying for.

8. DANIEL is a famous pattern of the resolute and courageous performance of this duty, against all opposition: although he might have pleaded, (if ever any) there is a lion in the way, I shall be slain in the streets or den, for exercise of prayer in my chamber; yet he feared nothing, he ventured upon a severe law, his prince's displeasure, the loss of his preferment, the rage of his competitors, and the lions' hungry stomachs, rather than he would omit or intermit his accustomed course of chamber-worship; he will endure the lions' cruelty, rather than neglect a known duty: nay, he is so far from gratifying his proud adversaries, that he will not in the least abate his wonted frequency, or visibility in the duty; "but his windows being open

* Jeremiah, ix. 1, 2.

toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day and prayed," Daniel, vi. 10. But did Daniel hold out a flag, or blow a trumpet, by setting open his windows to declare to men what he was going to do? Was not this contrary to the rule in the text? Are we here commanded to shut our door, and may Daniel open his window? Is not that all one? Surely that good man did not open his windows out of hypocrisy and vain-glory; but to shew his resolution, courage and constancy, out-daring these impious, presumptuous commands of men: he did not fear to be seen now in so plain a case. What spirit are they of, that will rather give themselves to the roaring lion, and incur the wrath of the King of heaven, which exceeds in terror a thousand hungry lions, than solemnly perform this useful duty of secret prayer: let the careless consider this.

9. PETER, a distinguished apostle, shall be another instance in the case, Acts ix. 40. When Tabitha or Dorcas lay dead in an upper chamber, and the widows stood weeping by her, and he was about to raise her, "he put them all forth, and kneeled down and prayed, and turning him to the body, said, Tabitha, arise, and she opened her eyes."—See here another miracle, like Elijah's, following secret prayer: but this was in an extraordinary case, did Peter use to pray alone? Yes, turn only to the next chapter, Acts x. 9, "Peter went up upon the house-top to pray, about the sixth hour," which was about noon, another praying season;* certainly he missed not morning and night for such devotion: he went to the top of the flat-rooft house, which was a private place, and equivalent to a closet; there Peter prayed, in prayer he fell into a trance, and in that trance he had a vision concerning the calling in of the

* Psalm lv. 17.

Gentiles,* a glorious mystery and transcendent mercy towards us poor outcasts—a mystery which had been kept secret since the world began, hid from ages and generations—a blessed mystery that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of God's promise in Christ by the gospel; yet this transcendent design of love was manifested to an eminent apostle while he was in the performance of this duty of secret prayer: this is very remarkable, and worth observation.

10. The last instance is of our blessed Saviour. Our dear Lord Jesus was very conversant in this duty. Mark, i. 35, "In the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed:" our precious Redeemer went about doing good, and the day-time he usually spent in preaching, conversation, healing diseases, &c. and the night he spent in prayer, meditation, and such other holy exercises: he had scarce time to eat or sleep for doing his father's work; he spent not one moment of time unprofitably in above thirty years: how early doth he rise, and earnestly doth he follow his business in communion with his Father, and in the work of our redemption? Yea, Luke vi. 12, "He continued all night in prayer to God;" that is, on a mountain, in secret prayer, and frequently elsewhere we shall find him alone, and in this work:† and wherefore was all this? Was it not principally for our sakes? for our salvation, and imitation? Yes certainly, he designed our good in all; he prayed that we might pray, and reap the profit of all his prayers and purchase. Hear we Cyprian expressly speaking on this point: "He taught us to pray not by words only but deeds; himself praying frequently, both supplicating, and demonstrat-

* Rom. xvi. 25. Col. i. 26, 27. Eph. iii. 5, 6. † Matt. xxvi. 36.

ing what we are to do by the evidence of his own example." *

Most divines hold the obligatory power of scripture examples, in things not forbidden; especially in prayer which being so laudable a practice, and implied in other scriptures, all the preceding instances seem cogent arguments; and the last, taken from the life of Jesus Christ, hath the force of a positive precept and command.

But there are few or none that have the face of Christians, who dare deny this to be a duty; though I fear many that would go for Christians, live in a common neglect of it.

CHAP. II.

REASONS TO PROVE THAT CLOSET PRAYER IS A CHRISTIAN DUTY.

SECTION I.

Privacy convenient for prayer.

ALL the reasons that I shall employ at present for the proof of this doctrine, and showing secret prayer to be a duty, shall be fetched out of the text, and they are these:

The conveniency of privacy for prayer.—The relation betwixt God and a believer.—God's omniscience.—God's munificence.

* Nec verbis tantum sed et factis Dominus orare nos docuit, ipse orans frequenter, et deprecans, et quid facere nos oportet exempli sui contestatione demonstrans.—*Cyp. Serm. de Orat. Dom.* p. 425.

First, The great conveniency there is in privacy for prayer, and the good providence of God, bestowing upon us private rooms, which implicitly calls us to the performance of that duty. For there is in retirement a great advantage for the managing of any work of wisdom, Prov. xviii. 1, "Through desire a man having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom," that is, he that is really studious of true piety will voluntarily sequester himself to prosecute it. This was anciently the well-meaning design of a monastic life, which since hath been wofully abused: but yet certainly there is a very great advantage in solitariness for carrying on a religious business. Take only two things at present, which are advantages attending this duty of prayer, whereunto secrecy contributes:

1. Self-expostulations, and self-abasing gestures and expressions. When a Christian in prayer finds his heart hard, dead, dull, distracted, or any way out of order, he may in secret make a pause, and begin to commune with his own heart, examine the matter, lament the cause, chide his untoward heart, and charge his roving spirit to keep close to his God in duty: thus David, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? Awake psaltery and harp, I myself will awake early: my soul wait thou upon God." Nothing is more common in the Psalms than such intercessions and diversions from the immediate exercise, to raise up the heart to a higher tune in prayer and praises. And this may be of singular use; for by such heart-reasonings and debates a saint may wind up his spirit, and get better prepared for the remaining part of the exercise: now such a work as this would not be so seasonable and convenient, when others join in the duty. So also for bodily postures; sometimes for an evidence of greater humiliation, a Christian finds it requisite to prostrate himself before

the Lord, and use such gestures as would not be fit in the sight of others; therefore closet prayer is very necessary where a Christian may use his discretion as God shall direct him, for the humbling, quickening, raising, and melting of his heart before the Lord alone.

2. It is a wonderful help against distraction. When we are (as it were) out of the noise of the world, we are then fitter for attendance upon God: the affairs, discourses, troubles, and confusions of a family (if within hearing) are a great hinderance to the duties of meditation and prayer: experience testifies this, a man cannot study or cast up accounts in a crowd or throng of people. When we are intent upon any business, how little a noise sometimes diverts us? It may be this was the reason why that hospitable gentlewoman, in 2 Kings iv. 10, would have a chamber built for her welcome guest the prophet Elisha, yea built upon the wall: for she might judge him to be a contemplative man, and though she might have lodging rooms in her house, yet she might look upon that at a little distance, as more commodious for his devotions and meditations, as being out of the noise of household business and hurry. An active fancy quickly closeth with any diversion in our attendance upon God, therefore ought we to study to attend upon the Lord without distraction: when Abraham went to worship in the mount, he left his servants below in the valley, lest they should obstruct his communion with God: when Moses was to go up unto the Lord, though Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and the seventy elders went further than the people, yet the text saith, "They should worship afar off;" but, saith God, "Moses alone shall come near the Lord," Exod. xxiv. 1, 2. Observe it, when Moses had parted with his company, and was alone, then he should come near the Lord; common

professors worship not God at all acceptably ; sincere saints worshipping God with others are comparatively far off ; but souls in a corner or closet are admitted to come near God, and have sweet intimacy with him, as I shall shew anon : yet mistake me not, as though I preferred secret prayer alone, before public prayer along with others ; for as God delights in the joint prayers of his people, so a soul may enjoy God in the communion of saints, and is ordinarily more carried out to God than in private, according to the helps and advantages he hath with others ; yet when the heart is in frame, there is usually more intimacy expressed betwixt God and the Christian in secret, than when in the company of others. Yet further, mistake not, as though solitariness freed us from all distractions : if we take our hearts with us, we shall have a principle of diversion, and want neither noise nor visible objects to keep us from God ; and this, those that have magnified solitariness most, have found by sad experience, and left upon record. Take an instance ; Cyprian speaking of Christ's fasting and being tempted in the wilderness, "Choosing," saith he, "that place for its secrecy, because fastings are to be observed so as God alone may be judge, and in such engagements as these we are to call on God alone as spectator and helper : " and he shews fully the danger of vain-glory, and the advantages of secrecy ; yet adds, "Let not a man imagine he hath escaped all dangers, when he comes into a wilderness or solitary place : for he is invaded by the tempter, so much the more dangerously, because more subtly, who sitting before the doors of the thoughts, seeks to strangle all the buds of virtue in their very appearance. Yet the disentangled soul will more freely resist its enemy, when the fetters of impediments are wanting, when the sight

discerns no allurements, and the conflict is more secure ; when particular affairs pluck not back the combatant, nor the delights of enticing pleasures inebriate the mind.”*

SECTION II.

Relation between God and a genuine Christian.

SECONDLY.—Another reason held forth also in the text, is drawn from that relation which is betwixt God and a believing soul ; therefore our Saviour says pray to thy Father : and this reason hath two parts—first, the believer can more freely open his heart to God in a closet ; secondly, God will more clearly manifest himself to the soul in secret.

1. A soul in secret making its addresses to God goes to him as a Father. Now, we know children cannot be so free in their addresses to their Father, in company, and before strangers, as when nobody is present :

* *Locus secretus eligitur, quia solius Dei judicio jejunia sunt agenda, et singularem inspectorem, adjutoremque Deum volunt hæc habere certamina, neque in agonibus aliquibus periculosus militatur: —Propter hoc, solitudo carens arbitris, et eremus, ostentatorum satellitio vacuo, a jejunante Christo eligitur, ut non cum carne et sanguine, sed cum spiritualibus nequitiiis dimicetur, et amotis minorum occasionibus homo cum diabolo colluctetur, et soli sint in palæstra Christus et Antichristus, Spiritus et Antispiritus. Neque patet hominem evasisse pericula cum in eremum venerit, quia quanto subtilius tanto difficilius a tentatore invaditur, qui cogitationum foribus assidens omnia virtutum germina in ipso ortu strangulare molitur.—Cyp. de Jejun. et Tentat. Christi, prope init. pag. 300, 301. Verum liberius, anima expedita obviat impugnanti ubi compedes impedimentorum defuerint et aspectus irritamenta non noverit: securiorque est congressus, ubi singula non vellicant dimicantem, nec inebriant animum lenocinia voluptatum.—Id. plur.*

hence it is, that when a child hath any special business with his Father, he takes him aside, or whispers to him, that none may over-hear him: and observe it, God's children have an errand to him that none must know of; as Ehud said to Eglon, "I have a secret errand to thee, O King," Judg. iii. 19. So a gracious soul may say, O my King, my God, my Father, I have a secret errand to thee: a depraved propensity to confess, or a mercy to beg or bless thee for, of which I would not have others to know. It is not fit any should be privy to that which a gracious soul tells God of: in this case it may be said, "Discover not thy secret to another," Prov. xxv. 9. Two may keep counsel, but three cannot: God and a gracious soul will be faithful to each other, but a third must not know of these matters; nay, in this case we may say, "Keep the doors of thy lips from her that lieth in thy bosom," Mic. vii. 5. There are many things a saint tells God of, with which he will not acquaint either father, or wife or friend, that is as his own soul, but only his heavenly Father; he opens his bosom freely to him, and tells him his whole heart, best and worst; hides nothing from him, because he only knows the heart: and truly I have often in this, admired the wisdom of God, who hath so far consulted his people's credit and modesty as to appoint them place and ways of speaking to him privately, designing secret prayer for this very end, that the soul may spread its case of wants and complaints before its Father, and present its petition to the King of heaven. The spouse of Christ is modest, (saith an ancient) and cannot so freely explain herself to her beloved before others as in secret; here then comes in the use and advantage of closet prayer, that a Christian may, (as Jonathan and David unbosomed themselves to each other alone) open his heart to God

where no eyes see, nor ears hear his secret groans and tears : but further,

2. God will more familiarly communicate himself to the soul in secret : he also hath something to whisper in the believer's ear, that none must know of ; and therefore takes him by himself ; a lively emblem whereof we have in Joseph making himself known to his brethren, when his bowels were working, "and he could not refrain himself, he cried, cause every man to go out from me. Then he wept aloud, and said I am Joseph."* And O what endeared reciprocal affections did work in all their breasts toward each other ! Just thus it is betwixt our Joseph and his brethren, Jesus Christ and his members ; there stands none with him while Jesus makes himself known unto his brethren ; and though at first they be, as it were, troubled at his presence, yet when he speaks tenderly, and passeth by former unkindnesses, and saith, come near unto me I pray you, then they come near, and he saith convincingly, "I am Jesus whom ye sold and crucified;" this affects and humbles their obdurate hearts, and being broken he pours oil into their troubled spirits, and speaks many heart-reviving words unto them ; then, then the child of God hath most sweet refreshing incomes : when God hath allured the soul into the wilderness, he speaks to the heart. A wilderness is a solitary place, where other speech is not heard, as the word imports :† then speaks God to the soul when men cannot speak to it : when men are remote, God is near at hand ; yea nearest to help, melt, comfort, and quicken, when men are farthest off : our Saviour saith of himself, John xvi. 32, "You leave me alone, yet I am not alone, for the Father is

* Gen. xlv. 1—4.

† Hos. ii. 14. מִדְּבָר Desertum, sic dictum per Antiphrasin quasi locus à sermone remotus.

with me," as if he had said, when you go away, my Father comes to visit me with most familiar endearings. O blessed exchange! Thus it is often with the saints: when men leave them, or they withdraw from men, they have, many times, most of God: and is it not infinitely better, to have the presence of God, than the company of men? What God saith of Abraham, is worth observing, Isa. li. 2, "I called him alone and blessed him." Mark it, when God had drawn Abraham from all his friends, and got him alone, then he blesseth him, and you know what the blessing of Abraham was, even a covenant blessing; such God distributes to his saints when he hath withdrawn them from company into some sequestered place: this is that which made an ancient profess, that a town was his prison—a solitary place his paradise.* Cities or numerous societies introduce a veil betwixt God and the soul, which solitariness withdraws, and thus many times becomes most sweet: we often lose God in a crowd of business or company, but find him when alone: hence a corner of our house may be a little corner of heaven, and in our closets we may find the sweetest cordials and contentment. You know, friends do most familiarly enjoy one another when others are not present; Jonathan sent away the lad when he would be familiar with his friend David:† and then they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded. There lies a restraint, as it were, upon God by company, which is taken off in a measure by solitariness. O when God finds a soul alone by itself, having set itself purposely to meet him, then he reveals his love, unveils his face, unlocks his blessed store, distributes doles of love and grace, and sends it not away empty, but full of grace and peace.

* *Mihi oppidum carcer est, solitudo paradusus.—Hieronym.*

† 1 Sam. xx. 40, 41.

Thus that word of Solomon is verified, Prov. xiv. 10, "The heart knoweth his own bitterness, and a stranger intermeddleth not with his joy," that is, no creature on earth is privy to the secret groans or sweet solace of a retired saint.

SECTION III.

God's omniscience and omnipresence.

THIRDLY, A further reason is drawn from the omniscience and omnipresence of God. The text saith, "Thy Father sees in secret:" and the strength or force of this argument lies in these four particulars:

1. *God sees in secret*, therefore he takes notice whether thou pray in secret or not: he looks after thee, as it were, when thou goest into such a chamber and solitary place, and saith, that person hath now an opportunity, a convenient place and fit occasion, to wait upon me, and will he not? Will he be always so busy in other company, that I must have none of his fellowship? Must his converse be so much with men, that he can spare no time for communion with God? nay, will he go so often into such a room to do such and such a business, and can he never find time to go down upon his knees, and address me? Hath he so much to do in the world, that he hath no leisure to look up to heaven? Do his worldly occasions still thrust out spiritual meditations? Will he never set himself solemnly in prayer and meditation, to transact betwixt myself and him the most important business of his soul? Ah sirs, the omnipresent God takes notice of all your movements into and out of your chambers, and expects that sometimes at least your souls should wait upon him. And why should Christians frustrate his expectations?

2. *God sees in secret*, therefore he hath seen thy secret sins : thy close and closet wickedness is naked and open before the piercing eyes of an all-seeing God ; and therefore should thy closet tears and prayers testify thy sound and saving repentance. For this is a rule in practical divinity, that sorrow for sin must bear some proportion to the nature and aggravations of the sin, both as to degree, and circumstances of time and place. Manasseh humbled himself greatly for his great abominations. So for place and manner, they that sin openly must be rebuked before all, and testify their repentance before the church.* So if the sin be private or less known, the rule in Matt. xviii. 15, 16, is to be observed for private admonition and confession : and consequently secret sins must be secretly mourned over. When thy sins are known to none but to God and thine own conscience, thou art not bound, except in some few cases, to discover them to any other but to God, in a hearty secret repentance. Here then come in secret prayer and godly sorrow : well, there are none of us without our secret sins, and God sees them all though never so privately committed ; we may hide sin from man, we cannot hide it from the Lord : he sets our secret sins in the light of his countenance, Psalm xc. 8. His eyes are open upon all the ways of man, and he knows all the errors of his life.† Therefore must we get alone and enumerate all the sins we know of, and desire God to shew us what we do not know, and with holy David, breathe out that devout petition, Psalm xix. 12, “Cleanse thou me from secret faults.”

3. *God sees in secret*, therefore thou dost not lose thy labour, though men know not where thou art, or what thou art doing, yet thy God takes notice of thee : thou dost not thy good works *incognito*, though thy groans

1 Tim. v. 20. † Job xxxiv. 21, 22. Jer. xxxii. 19. Prov. v. 21.

are not seen or heard by men, yet they are well known to thy God, Ps. xxxviii. 9, "Lord, all my desire is before thee, and my groaning is not hid from thee;" as if David had said, Lord, I many times withdraw myself into a closet or retired place, and there I lay before thee the sorrows of my soul, "I pour out my heart like water before the face of the Lord," Lam. ii. 19; sometimes in the night watches, or in solitary places, none knows what I am doing; no eye sees my briny tears; no ear hears my bitter outcries; but the all-seeing God hides not his eyes from my tears, stops not his ears at my cries, but knows my groans, yea my very desires. Observe it, there is not a believing prayer but it is upon the file, and on record in heaven, though offered up by an obscure person, and in an obscure place; God even knoweth the meaning of his Spirit in the hearts of his people, though the troubled saint cannot tell whether it be indeed the Spirit of God or not:* but this know, that secret prayers in a chamber are as well known to God, as open prayers in a public church; heart ejaculations are owned by God as much as the loudest acclamations. God took notice of Hezekiah when he turned his face toward the wall, and wept and prayed, and said God, "I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears," Isa. xxxviii. 5. Though men did not much take notice, God did; yea more, he expresseth his approbation and acceptance of these sacrifices in secret; but of that, anon.

4. *God sees in secret*, therefore closet prayer is a solemn acknowledgment of God's omniscience and omnipresence: when you pray in retirement, you testify your faith in God's ubiquity, and look upon him as filling heaven and earth; and this God commands us to believe, yea would have us to lie under the sense hereof. Hence that vehement expostulation, Jer. xxiii. 24,

* Rom. viii. 17.

“ Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him, saith the Lord? Do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord?” Yes, saith the believing soul, I know thou art every where ; no thought can be withholden from thee, therefore I wait on thee here : all is one where I am, for wherever I am, I cannot escape from thee ; and wherever I am, I may approach unto thee : and the Lord is nigh to broken hearts and praying souls ; he is not far from every one of us, but his special presence is with his saints engaged in duty.* David composed a Psalm on God’s immensity, Psalm cxxxix, wherein he shews, (1.) God’s omniscience, in the six first verses, “ thou knowest my down-sitting and mine up-rising,” &c. (2.) God’s omnipresence, ver. 7—14, “ whither shall I go from thy spirit? If to heaven thou art there,” &c. Darkness and light are both alike to thee : and what use doth holy David make of this heavenly doctrine? Surely if God will be with him wherever he is, he is resolved to be with God, ver. 18, “ when I awake I am still with thee,” that is, by secret prayer and meditation : when I lie down I commend my soul and body to thee, and when I rise up I meditate on thee ; when I go to sleep I pray, when I awake I am with God by holy and precious thoughts. So that I am still with God ; all my days, in all places, conditions, relations, companies, I am still with my God ; and as a good man used to say, “ My God and I are good company.” This, this is to be thorough-paced in religion ; this is Enoch’s walking with God, a conversation in heaven, a fellowship with the Father, an emblem of glory, and the sweetest, happiest life a soul is capable of in this world ; and much of this consists in conversing with God in the duty of secret prayer. All this flows from a due apprehension of God’s omniscience

* Psalm xxxiv. 15, 17, 18.

and omnipresence, and this reason Cyprian renders, why Jesus Christ here doth prescribe our closet devotions as most agreeable to our christian faith, that we may know God is every where present, hears all, and pierceth with the fulness of his majesty into the inmost rooms, and hidden places according to the scriptures:* and truly this is a doctrine worth confirming by such a practice: and this is a practice worthy of such a doctrine.

SECTION IV.

The Liberality of God.

LASTLY, The text saith, *Thy Father that seeth in secret will reward thee openly*: this reason is drawn from God's munificence: wherein we have, first, the promise, that is, *a reward*; secondly, the manner of performance, *openly*: this is a comfortable circumstance, it is worth something to know that our labour is not lost, it shall be rewarded, yea it shall be rewarded by God, whose rewards are great like himself, it shall even be rewarded by our Father. A father takes in good part a little service from an obedient child, and gives a great reward for a little work; closet prayer also shall be openly rewarded. The observableness of the mercy enhanceth the rate of it; tending more to increase a Christian's comfort, to exhibit an example for others, to afford encouragement to right worshippers, and to advance the glory of God: all these things might

* Denique magisterio suo Dominus secreta nos orare precepit in abditis et secretis vel semotis locis, in cubiculis ipsis, quod magis convenit fidei, ut sciamus Deum ubique esse presentem, audire omnes, et videre, et majestatis suæ plenitudine in abdita quoque et occulta penetrare, sicut scriptum est, Jer. xxiii. 23, 24, et Prov. xv. 3. *Cypr. Serm. de orat. Dom. p. 409.*

take up much time, but I shall only suggest what is that open reward which God gives to such as are constant in closet prayer; that is given in these four ways:

1. By returning a visible answer to secret prayer. None saw Jacob wrestling hand to hand, as it were, with the angel, but all might observe the tender embraces betwixt that good man and his hostile brother Esau;* there was no witness of Moses' intercession for Israel in the mount, but all the congregation and the whole world, may bear witness of God's hearing his prayer, for sparing an offending people.† When Eli observed Hannah's lips move, and heard no voice, he misjudged her to be a drunken woman, but the truth is, she was busy with her God in earnest prayer; and though he knew nothing of it then, yet afterwards he saw the effect: compare 1 Sam. i. 13, with ver. 27, "For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him:" (*Ecce signum*) "behold a sign of his favour! behold an evident token that I prayed in truth! Many a time, yes many a time was I provoked by my scoffing adversary Peninnah, and as often did I make my complaint to my heavenly husband; and see here the fruit of my sincere devotions in private: none saw my tears, all may see my child; none heard my cries in prayer, but the voice of my Samuel may be heard by all Israel: he shall carry the memorial of answer to secret prayer in his name to the grave:" and cannot many a soul speak the same language? Cannot you set your seal to the same or like experiment? Cannot some of God's children say, this mercy I got from God in such a room, chamber, or closet? No creature upon earth knew my object there; but now all may see the happy effects of my hard wrestling, I find that it is not in vain to seek God in

* Gen. xxxii. 24, with chap. xxxiii. 4. † Exod. xxxii. 10, 11, 14.

private ; none knows the meaning of the mercy but myself. I may call it Naphtali, for with great wrestlings have I wrestled with my God and prevailed.* This mercy bears a double price to all the rest, for it is gained by prayer, and now may be worn with praises and triumphing, so that a believer may say, "This is my God, I have waited for him, he will save me ; this is, my God, Jehovah, I have waited for him, I will be glad and rejoice in his salvation : "† lo here he is, I can now make my boast of my God. Wicked men are wont to say, "Where is thy God ?" now I can say in reply, lo this is he that returns such answers to my prayer, that appears so gloriously for me, this is my God in whom I have trusted, on whom I have called, and he hath answered, I am not disappointed : blessed be God, these appearances are the visible returns of my secret prayers.

2. God rewards secret prayer openly, by discriminating providences in a common calamity. God usually takes those into the chambers of his protection, who have retired into chambers of devotion ;‡ they that enjoy most of God, shall be best secured by God. Psalm xci. 1, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty : " that is, he that by faith and prayer hath got most intimate communion with God, is lodged under the safest shelter in the day of danger : and who is so likely to enjoy God as that Christian that waits upon him in secret ? he who is much with God in secret places, gets into God's secret place. David put up many a hearty prayer in solitary caves ; and how remarkable does God secure him in the day of apparent hazard, to the conviction of Saul and his courtiers ? We find the mourners in Sion lamenting secretly the abominations

* Gen. xxx. 8.

† Isa. xxv. 9.

‡ Isa. xxvi. 20.

committed openly, and God sets an obvious mark upon their foreheads, seen discernibly by the destroying angel, and known apparently by the effects thereof to the world, in their exemption from the general stroke of desolation, Exek. ix. 4, 6. Jeremiah's soul weeps in secret for the pride and profaneness of Israel; and he was strongly secured in the days of Israel's dreadful destruction.* What is recorded in Gen. xix. 29, is very remarkable—"God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow." Why, what did Abraham? the former chapter tells us, that Abraham had been with God in prayer in secret, and this was the effect of it, God will snatch Lot out of that dreadful burning as a return of secret prayer. God selects a season to put a difference betwixt his praying people and others; faith and prayer are two feet of the soul, whereby the righteous run to the name of the Lord which is their strong tower and are safe:† a soul hid with God cannot be hurt by men: if any be secured in a day of danger, it is those that are most with God in secret: "Floods of great waters shall not come nigh" to praying saints, Psalm xxxii. 6; hence saith David, ver. 7, "Thou art my hiding-place, thou shalt preserve me from trouble." Some way or other God will attest and testify the integrity of his praying servants before the world:‡ thus he did in the case of Job. God's children may be long concealed from the view of men, both as to their persons and conduct; but in God's good time he brings them out with honour, as he did Elijah. Sometimes God gives clear demonstrations of his tender affection for his despised saints in the view of the world: Rev. iii. 9, "I will make them to come, and worship before thy feet, and to know that

* Jer. xiii. 17, with chap xxxix. 11, 12.

† Prov. xviii. 10.

‡ See Psal. xxxi. 19, 20, and xci. 15.

I have loved thee:" this is not a religious adoration, but a civil reverence due to real saints as an evidence of repentance, or special respect, as dogs fawn upon their masters, laying themselves at their feet, as the word imports, Natural conscience sometimes doth homage to the image of God in the saints: however this is a well known truth, that as God hath brought forth wicked men's secret works of darkness, into open light, to their confusion in this world; so he hath clearly discovered his saints' upright services in secret corners, to their honour and safety at the most critical time. Jaddus hearing of Alexander's approach to Jerusalem, set himself to pray; then put on his priestly garments and met the conqueror, who fell down on his face before him. Parmenio asked him why he adored the Jews' High Priest, while other men adored himself; Alexander answered, I do not adore him, but that God whom the High Priest worshippeth; for in my sleep I saw him in such a habit, when I was in Macedonia:† but examples of this nature are frequent every where, what strange effects prayer hath brought forth, both for defence to the saints, and injury to their enemies; so that the clear evidence hereof hath wrested from many stout opposers, that acknowledgment of the queen of Scots, that she feared more the prayers of John Knox than an army of ten thousand fighting men.

3. God rewards secret prayer openly by conferring upon secret wrestlers more eminent gifts and graces of his Spirit, and such as shall be taken notice of by others. They that are most constant in secret prayer, shall be most eminent in public prayer: such as with Moses

* Προσκυνεῖν ἀπο τοῦ κυνός. Sese ad pedes alicujus subjectionis causâ proolvere; qualiter catelli heris suis adblandiuntur.

† See Clark's General Martyrol, fol. 5, also Rollin's Anc. Hist. Lib. 15, Sect. 7.

converse with God in the mount, shall have shining faces : the beauty of the Lord shall be upon them : when a believer hath been with his God in private, the effects are so remarkable, that others take knowledge of him that he hath been with Jesus ; and it must needs be so ; for, conversing with God is of a transforming nature, 2 Cor. iii. 18, " But we all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." God's appointments are as glasses through which we may see the face of God. Now there are two sorts of glasses, broader and narrower ; the broader glasses are public ordinances, and the narrower glasses are private duties : in both these a soul may seek and see the face of God, and so become like him ; for, seeing here is assimilating, as the vision of God hereafter is glorifying. O it is a beautifying and beatifical sight to see God ! Fulness of grace is the best thing in glory ; peace and joy are but, as it were, the gloss and varnish of this fulness of grace : now the more a soul enjoys God the more god-like and heaven-like he is, for his graces shine brighter, and he is still mounting higher ; and private or secret duties are notable ways of communion with God ; yea sometimes a soul may miss of Christ in public ordinances, and find him in secret ; so some interpret that place in Cant. iii. 1—4.* The church had sought her beloved in the temple-worship and public ordinances, in the streets and broad ways of synagogues and communion of saints—still she found him not ; then she seeks him in conferences and occasional meetings with the watchmen, but she can yet hear no tidings of Jesus Christ ; but saith she, it was but a little that I passed from them, and I found him whom my soul loveth. Observe it, this was not when she was

* See Mr. Cotton in loc.

past all means in a way of neglect of, or being above ordinances ; for she was seeking him still, which implies the use of means, only she had past such as were public without finding, and now she is in the use of private helps, the after duties of meditation, self-examination, secret prayer, and therein the soul finds God ; not that this reflects disparagement on the public ordinances, but to shew that God is a free agent, and to be a reason and encouragement for us in the use of all God's appointments : and when a believer thus finds God in private he carries away something of God that casts a sweet perfume upon his person and actions that is taken notice of by others ; it may be said of such a soul, as Isaac spoke of his son Jacob, Gen. xxvii. 27, " See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed." So when a serious Christian comes down from his closet where he hath met with his God, O what a sweet perfume of well scented graces doth he send forth ! The savour of religion is upon him, some breathing odours of holiness break from his lips, hands, and feet ; the power of godliness doth manifest itself in his expressions, actions, and conversation : where hath such a one been ? Surely he hath been conversing with God ; there is the living image and superscription of God upon him, and while that blessed frame continues, he is not like himself ; as he excels carnal men at all times, so now he excels himself : yea observe it, a soul conversing much with God in the duties of meditation and secret prayer grows taller by head and shoulders than other ordinary Christians : as all godly men are more excellent than their neighbours, so a person that waits much on God in secret prayer, is more excellent than most of his godly neighbours ; it appears so at present by his gifts in praying, and may appear in his support and comfort in

the day of suffering: O what a mighty man in closet prayer was magnanimous Luther! And what noble achievements did he go through! William Gardiner,* martyr, in Portugal, sought out solitary places for prayer before he attempted that singular act of public opposition to idolatry, in taking the host out of the cardinal's hand, trampling it under his feet, when with the other hand he overthrew the chalice: which act though it may seem scarcely warrantable in an ordinary way; yet shewed a heroical spirit for the main, obtained by a conscientious attendance upon God in the duty of secret prayer. Take one instance more; it is Mr. George Wishart,† or Wiseheart, one of the holiest men and choicest Reformers that Scotland ever had. One night he got up and went into a yard, where he walked in an alley for some space, breathing forth many sobs and deep groans, then he fell upon his knees, and his groans increased; then he fell upon his face. Two men watched him, and heard him weeping and praying, near an hour, on which he went to bed again: as this saint was much with God, so the Lord was much with him in preaching, prophesying, acting courageously, and suffering death cheerfully. Surely the Spirit of God and of glory rested upon this man of God, if ever upon any, the adversaries themselves being judges: this is a great truth, those have been most eminent, who have been most with God in secret prayer: let Scripture and history speak, time and room would fail me to enumerate instances: who more famous for piety and learning of late years, than the great Usher? It was his usual practice to sequester himself in some privacy, and to spend it in strict examination, penitential humiliation,

* Clark's General Martyr, c. xxix. fol. 243.

† Ibid. fol. 318.

and ardent supplication, and this he found sweet to his soul; and others saw the effect.*

4. The last and chief reward that our heavenly Father will bestow on those that have waited on him in secret prayer, will be the open acknowledgment and acceptance of them at that solemn day of judgment, when the whole world shall be summoned before the Lord, "and every one shall receive the things done in his body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad," 2 Cor. v. 10. Then our blessed Saviour who shall be Judge, will single out this seed of Jacob, and tell them they have not sought his face in vain; he will now solemnly acknowledge them before his Father and all the holy angels, as persons with whom he hath had familiar acquaintance in secret. O the joy and triumph arising from such a public acknowledgment! when our dear Redeemer shall speak such a language as this before those myriads of beings! "This or that person," calling him forth with honour, "though not taken notice of in the world for religion, much less for worldly greatness, hath yet had intimate familiarity with myself, and I with him; he hath performed many a solemn duty which none but an omniscient eye hath seen: though he hath lived obscurely in the world, and hath been little known to eminent preachers or professors; yet he and I have been long and well acquainted. I have had his company many times in private, and now I cannot but remember the kindness of his youth and old age, the love of his espousals when he went after me in solitary places, rather than want my presence: he hath visited me in duty, and I have visited him in mercy: what mutual endearments, and reciprocal exchanges of love have there been betwixt

* Bernard's *Life and Death of Dr. Usher*, p. 27.

us ! He hath owned me, and I have owned him in the day of adversity ; whenever he had any doubt or want, or fear, or affliction, I heard from him in a closet ; he sent his winged messenger of a believing prayer to the throne of grace, and I received it well from him. I did not despise his person, or deny his suit ; when others have been sporting away time in vain recreations, or damning their souls in profane practices, this ransomed believer when he could steal a little time, run into a corner, and there did make his complaint to me ; and then I gave him something worth his pains, I sent him away with a cheerful heart and thankful tongue : and now take notice all ye angels and men, I declare that I accept his labour of love, and pardon all his imperfections, and set him in my immediate presence in eternal mansions : he that separated himself from the world, shall now be separated from the goats, and be set on my right hand ; he that longed so much to be with me, shall everlastingly enjoy me, without cessation or interruption." O blessed day ! O transcendent reward ! Is not this a rewarding openly ? You will say, how do you know that Jesus Christ will thus address a praying soul ? I reply, though we know not the form of words he will speak, yet that a discovery shall be made of acts of piety and charity, Mat. xxv. 34—36, evidently declares. Yea, that secret duties shall be brought to light as well as secret sins, the scriptures assure us, 1 Cor. iv. 5—"Who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts, and then shall every man have praise of God : " then good men shall receive open approbation and commendation for their holy exercises in sequestered places : then will God wipe off all reproaching calumnies of black-mouthed liars, wherewith they have bespattered the reputation of praying saints, and clear

up their uprightness as the noon-day, by letting the world see, how the saints have spent their time in retirement, both alone, and with their fellow Christians ; not in plotting but praying ; even pleading for those that persecuted them. O blessed day ! O happy resurrection of bodies and of names. Surely praying souls will not then repent of all their pains in private, when they poured out their hearts in prayers and tears, since now they are rewarded with such a blessed *euge*, and are openly introduced into their Master's joy and Father's kingdom.

CHAP. III.

COMPRISING INFORMATION.

SECTION I.

Concerning Places of Prayer.

IF closet prayer be a christian duty, then it shews us, that in gospel-times God stands not precisely upon places : this holy incense may ascend to heaven with as much acceptance upon the golden altar, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, in a private chamber as a public church. Some have scornfully called private devotions, by the derogating title of chimney-prayers ; and think to confine all religion to public places : yea a great scholar said once, God heard prayer in a consecrated place, not because men pray, but because they pray there,* as though the conceived holiness of the place added some virtue to the prayer,

* Expressed "*Non quia precatur, sed quia ibi.*"

or rendered it more acceptable to God. This is worse than plain Judaism, to bind religion to places :* the true gospelized Christian hath otherwised learned Christ. It is true, under the Old Testament dispensation, after the erecting of the temple, prayer was to be made at it, or towards it, as it typified Christ, through whom our prayers are accepted : but that holiness being ceremonial, it has been abolished by the gospel : now that takes place, John iv. 21, “Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this Mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father ;” that is, God now doth not so much regard the place, as the manner of worship, “that men worship in spirit and truth,” ver. 23, 24. Now is the prophecy accomplished, Mal. i. 11. “In every place, incense shall be offered to my name.” Which the apostle also asserts expressly, 1 Tim. ii. 8. Much hath been said in controversy concerning the holiness of places ; but this seems to be an undeniable argument against that conceit, that if some places be holy by the consecration of them to holy uses, then it followeth that other places not so consecrated, howbeit applied to the same holy use, are more profane and less adapted for divine worship than places consecrated, which would directly contradict the scriptures last mentioned. Indeed Hooker† teacheth that “the service of God in places not sanctified, as churches are, hath not in itself such perfection of grace, and comeliness, as when the dignity of the place, which it wisheth for, doth concur, and that the very majesty and holiness of the place where God is worshipped, bettereth even our holiest and best actions :” to which we dare not subscribe, but rather say with Dr. John Reynolds, that “to us Christians no land is strange, no ground unholy :

* Judaismus est, alligare religionem ad certa loca.—*Hospin. de Orig. Temp. lib. 4. c. 2.*

† *Eccles. Polit. lib. 5, c. 16.*

every coast is Jewry, every town Jerusalem, every house Zion, and every faithful company, yea every faithful body, a temple to serve God in.”*

But I shall not enter on a dispute upon this subject : the duty enjoined in the text is clear—if God command and accept closet prayer, then he doth not make so great a matter of the place for this duty as some imagine, since it cannot be imagined that closet prayer can be performed ordinarily in a consecrated place, as they call it, and there being no such place where a duty can be performed, to which God hath more expressly promised a reward, than what is performed in a corner or closet ; and therefore we have no warrant to expect acceptance merely upon the account of one place more than another.

Indeed it is a common practice of some persons, to perform their private devotions in public places. For you will see some at their entrance into a church or chapel, whatever public worship is in hand, fall down upon their knees, or put their hats or hands before their faces, and so begin to pray. I will not call this the sacrifice of fools, but I judge it very unseasonable: for we should join with God’s people in the public ordinances, and prefer them before any thing that we can then undertake. The original of this practice was, a conceit that the place was more holy than their own houses ; and that their prayer would be heard there rather than at home: it is too sad a sign that they had not prayed before they came thither. I am sure, it savours rankly of a pharisaical spirit, for the fault which our Saviour here rectifies, was that of the Pharisees praying individually in public places ; and in opposition thereunto he directs his disciples to the duty of the text, namely, to pray in their closets.†

* Confer. with Hart. c. 8. Div. 4, page 491.

† Eo proposito Dominus vetat in conventu orare, ut à conventu videatur.—*Chrysost. Ho. 13. Op. Im. Perf. sup. Math.*

SECTION II.

On the Nature of Prayer.

WE may hence be informed concerning the nature, usefulness, excellency, and efficacy of the duty of prayer; I speak not now of prayer in general, but in reference to closet prayer. And in this point of view, there are two conclusions which may be drawn concerning prayer.

1. It follows, that prayer is immediate worship of God: for what hath been said, shews that we have to do immediately with God, yea that a man alone singly hath to do with God: therein it is different from other parts of God's instituted worship, which do necessarily require company; as in preaching of the word, there must be hearers; in the seals of the covenant, as in baptism and the Lord's supper, there must be a society, such a number as may be styled a church: accordingly the latter is called a communion, hence saith the apostle, "We being many are one bread, and one body:"* but it is not absolutely or essentially requisite to prayer, that there be a society; one man or woman, by him or herself alone, may perform this duty of prayer as acceptably to God, as if in the company of a thousand saints: we object not to the public or private meetings of God's people for prayer; but withal affirm, that the nature of the duty is such, that it may be performed solitarily and alone. Hence school-men make a distinction relative to prayer, saying that it is either common or singular:† both have their place and use: though great stress is laid upon Christ's promise, Matt. xviii. 20, engaging to be where two or three are met in his

* 1 Cor. x. 16, 17.

† Communis vel Singularis, Aq. 2. 2 æ. q. 83. Art. 12.

name ; which as we deny not, so we assert the obligation of a single person praying according to the text : we give both their due, without comparison.

2. Prayer cannot be prevented in its ascent to God : all the persecutors on earth, cannot hinder a soul's praying. This is demonstrated two ways :

(1.) A child of God banished out of all human society may pray still. Suppose a man were rejected by men, and cut off from all intercourse with men, and were shut up in the closest prison, or shut out in the remotest wilderness ; suppose a man were to inhabit the caves and dens of the earth ; yet still he might pray and be heard, according to Solomon's prayer, that if God's people were carried captive into the land of their enemies, far or near, yet if they repented and prayed unto God towards their land, and that house of God ; then he begs that God would hear them ; and God testifies that he did hear this prayer of Solomon, 1 Kings, viii. 46, 41, with chap. ix. 3. The passage to heaven is as near and open from one part of the earth as another ; therefore David said he would " cry to God from the end of the earth," Psalm lxi. 2. A notable instance of this we have in Jonah, he was at the bottom of the sea, (as far from heaven locally as one could imagine) in a great fish's belly, which he calls the very belly of hell ; and as he was then far from men, so he looks upon himself as cast out of the sight of God, and he pathetically expresseth his misery and hopeless state. What doth he in this doleful plight ? Why he will look towards God's holy temple ; alas, poor Jonah knew not now which way the temple stood, he had but a small prospect in that dark and narrow prison ; yet, faith can set Jonah upon one of the mountains of Israel, that from thence he may see as far as mount Zion, and reach as high as heaven ; he prays, yea cries ; God

hears, and delivers: as low as he was, he knocks at heaven's gates, and his prayer doth pierce the clouds, it makes bold, and steps in, "My prayer," saith he, "came in unto thee, into thine holy temple," Jonah ii. 2, 7, O the wonderful and swift motion of believing prayer! Let the praying soul be where it will, prayer will come to God's ear, and get an answer.

(2.) A child of God that cannot speak a word, may put up an acceptable prayer. Suppose the tongue which is the organ of speech, were incapacitated or wanting, yet a saint cannot thereby be obstructed in his access to God by prayer. For, as Amesius saith, (*Oratio formaliter est actus voluntatis*) prayer is formally the act of the will; desire is the soul of prayer which God can hear, though it be not expressed, for he knows the heart, Psalm x. 17, "Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble." A saint's desire is a real prayer;* if the desire be right, words are but the outward garb, habit, or clothes, as I may say, of prayer, the frame or shell of the duty; ardent desires are the life, kernel, or marrow of the performance: hence we find that Moses, Hannah, and Nehemiah, are said to pray, when scripture doth not express a word they spoke, nor is it probable they did make any articulate sound:* I speak not this to indulge carnal men in their lazy conceited ejaculations, as though they could pray well enough, and never speak; or while they are working, walking, or talking.† Let me suggest a word, by the way, on these: consider, silly man, God has given thee a body, and thou must offer it to God as a reasonable sacrifice; thou art bound in conscience to pray and praise God with thy tongue, which is thy glory; yea

* Deus exaudit non solum preces indicativas sed et optativas.—*Luth.*

† Exod. xiv. 15. 1 Sam. i. 13. Neh. ii. 4.

let me tell thee, if thou hast those members of body, and an opportunity to pray thus solemnly with thy tongue upon thy knees, and dost never do it, I question whether thou ever prayest at all, since thou livest in the evident neglect of a known duty: what I have said respecting genuine, though sometimes not vocal prayer, is to commend the duty, and comfort those who may be in such exigencies, that though they cannot speak, yet they may pray, and be heard and answered.

SECTION III.

On the Efficacy of Prayer.

I may also take occasion to discover the power and efficacy of prayer, considered as a closet exercise: though but a single person, in whatever humble circumstances, get upon his knees in secret, and have no creature to help him, yet he can undertake to plead with the omnipotent and eternal God, yea by his strength he may have power with God, as we read of Jacob; who by singly wrestling with him, hand to hand, as it were, wrestled a blessing from him. One individual, Elijah, unsupported, could stand alone against at least four hundred prophets of Baal,* and prevail, having recourse to the living God by prayer, yea the apostle tells us, that this Elijah though but a mortal man, shut up and opened heaven, that it rained, and rained not, according to his prayer; hence he infers as a universal maxim, that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much, James v. 16—18. But some may object, that Elijah was a great prophet, an extraordinary person; that he might prevail when we cannot: the apostle

* 1 Kings, xviii. 36.

answers, he was no more than a man, “a man subject to like passions as we are,” a sinful creature; he prevailed not for any merits of his own, but through faith in the mediator of the covenant, and so may we. There is not the meanest child of God but hath the same plea: God hath strength enough to give, saith one; but he hath no strength to deny.* Here the Almighty himself (with reverence be it spoken) is weak: even a child in grace, the weakest in his family, that can but say, *Father*, is able to overcome him, for prayer is in a sort omnipotent; it can conquer the invincible Jehovah, and bind the hands, as it were, of an omnipotent God,† so that God cries out to wrestling Moses, “Let me alone.” It is said of Luther, that he could do with God even what he would. Prayer hath a kind of commanding compulsive power: that is a surprising text, Isa. xlv. 11, “Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me:” thus some take it—ye shall find me as ready to do you service, as if ye had me at command; yet this must be cautiously received, not as though God were forced to any thing against his will, but when God’s people pray aright in the name of Christ according to his will, he heareth them; and this he attributes to prayer, for the credit of that duty and our encouragement to pray.‡ The following text shews the readiness of God to answer prayer, John xvi. 26, 27—“I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father himself loveth you.” Christ in this place intends not to deny that he will intercede for them, but shews how ready God is of his own accord to grant the saints’ petitions; they shall not be put to any great trouble about it, but shall be quickly dispatched when they have gone their errands

* Mr. Gurnal on Eph. vi. 10, p. 42.
ligat omnipotentem.

† Vincit invincibilem,
‡ 1 John, v. 14.

to the throne of grace: for as Luther speaks,* a feeble groan in the ears of God is a mighty noise, and doth so fill heaven and earth, that God can hear nothing besides it, but silenceth all other tumults to hearken to it.

Of what an easy quick access,
 My blessed Lord art thou! how suddenly
 May our requests thy ear invade!
 To shew that State dislikes not easiness:
 If I but lift mine eyes my suit is made:
 Thou canst no more not hear, than thou canst die.

SECTION IV.

A Love of Retirement characteristic of a true Christian.

ONCE more, I might shew that to make this excellent use of solitariness, is the duty and marks the character of a sincere Christian. Carnal persons love not to be alone, except they be such whose constitution inclines them to melancholy, and then they sit poring on things without profit; it is only the gracious soul that can tell how to make the right use of solitariness by having recourse to God. No man cares for being alone but the serious person, and no man cares for going to God when alone, but the sincere Christian. Man is a sociable creature, and naturally we have no mind to entertain ourselves by ourselves; a carnal heart hates a domestic audit, men that have shrewish wives love not to be at home, and persons that have guilty consciences cannot endure to come to an explanation with them, lest they be tormented before the time. O but a Christian that is upright, and downright, would know all that concerns his own heart, the best and worst: there-

* *Exiguus gemitus in auribus Dei fortissimus est clamor; et ita cælum et terram replet, ut præter eum Deus nihil audiat, at compescit omnes omnium aliarum rerum clamores.*—*Luth. tom. 4.*

fore he communes with his own heart, as David did;* and lest he miss or mistake in his search, he turns him to the heart-searching God by prayer, and entreats him to search his heart and discover him to himself. The life of religion consists in a soul's communion with God in secret; a man hath so much religion as he hath betwixt God and his own soul, and no more. A true saint dares in secret to appeal to God for the sincerity of his heart: he is there exercising himself, like a soldier by himself handling his pike, and keeping his postures, that he may be better fitted for a more serious onset; yea, a Christian doth purposely withdraw himself from company that he may converse with God. Papists are true Christians' apes; hence comes the solitary life of monks; pretending to imitate Elijah, and Elisha, John Baptist, and the Apostles: but it is acknowledged by Jerome, and great sticklers for a monastic life, that this practice begun not till about the year 260, or 300. Some say Hilarion, others Paulus Thebæus, others Antonius, begun this manner of living: but certainly there is a vast difference betwixt the solitary life of the ancient Christians and the Papists' way of monastic retirement.

1. Those first Christians lived solitary of necessity, that they might lie hid more safely in a time of persecution.

2. They were not compelled to give all to the poor.

3. They were not bound to a certain rule, nor did they engage themselves by perpetual vow to that place and state, but might change their manner of life if they saw good; they were not bound as to meats, marriage, or fasting.†

4. Those ancient monks were of the laity, not of the clergy, nay not so much as deacons, or presbyters.

* Psalm. lxxvii. 6.

† Vid. Perk. Demonstr. problem. Monach. p. 217—223.

5. They had no conceit of merit in a monastic life, till these latter ages : I may add,

6. Those ancient monks had a particular calling, and did work, as the monks of Bangor that lived by the sweat of their brows ;* and,

7. They were not restrained from conversing abroad, as there was occasion ; and occasions there are manifold. It is not fit persons should be always cooped up in a corner, but that they be of use to others in their places and capacities : we were not born for ourselves, nor must we live only within ourselves, which would contradict the law of love and charity : a constant solitariness exposeth persons to a world of temptations ; it is not good to be alone, saith Solomon. An ancient could speak it from his own experience, that a solitary life is inferior to common intercourse with others, because it is full of importunate cogitations, which, like little flies arising from a dunghill, fly into the eyes of the heart, and interrupt the sabbath of the mind.†

But I need not trouble you with the mention of popish fopperies. A right bred Christian, that hath learned the truth as it is in Jesus, being thrust into a retired place, knows how to improve solitariness for his soul's advantage ; and voluntarily doth withdraw himself from the world, that he may set himself to the work of God in good earnest. Hence saith the apostle concerning husband and wife, 1 Cor. vii. 5, "Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer ;" thence note,

* Clark's Eccles. Hist. fol. 13.

† Vita solitaria communi inferior est ; quia importunis cogitationibus plena, quæ tanquam muscæ minutissimæ de limo surgentes, volant in oculos cordis et interrumpunt sabbathum mentis. *Ivo Carnatensis Epis.* 258.—Vide sis plura in *Perkins* ubi supra, Demonstrat. Monasteria veterum, ut plurimum, fuisse scholas publicas, id est communitates docentium et discentium.

that it is convenient sometimes for Christians to sequester themselves from nearest relations, that they may have free communion with God in holy duties:* only let these four cautions and limitations of the text be observed, 1. That it be with mutual consent—2. But for a season—3. That it have as its object an advantage for fasting and prayer—4. That they come together again: this respects not every day's ordinary performances, but some solemn engagement for stated and extraordinary fasting in a day of danger or calamity; at which time, "the bridegroom is to go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet, Joel ii. 16; that is, to sequester themselves from conjugal intercourse, to afflict their souls by fasting and prayer: but in these cases, a sound Christian's due discretion regulated by the general rules laid down in scripture, will be sufficient for his guidance, that he may not dash either on the rock of superstition or of negligence, but maintain a close and constant communion with God in the duties of his general and particular calling in public ordinances, and in private and secret duties.

CHAP. IV. .

CASES WHICH MERIT REPREHENSION.

SECTION I.

Wicked men reproved.

HERE is just ground of sharp rebuke to all careless, prayerless persons, who understand nothing of this duty; they know not what it is to pour out their hearts

* Vide Pareum in loc.

before the Lord, in closet prayer. David saith, "The wicked through the pride of his countenance will not seek after God; God is not in all his thoughts," Psalm x. 4: he cannot pray aright any where, much less in secret. The same Psalm tells us what he doth in secret, ver. 8—10, "In the secret places doth he murder the innocent, his eyes are privily set against the poor." The apostle saith, "It is a shame even to speak of those things that are done of them in secret," Eph. v. 12. O the abominable practices of profane spirits in private! Their consciences can tell them sad stories of secret sins, which none but the God of heaven and themselves know of, yea, because they see not God they think God sees not them; like the ostrich, silly bird, because she thrusts her head into a bush, she thinks she is hid from the fowler, though her body be exposed to open view. Carnal men's maxim is like that monkish one, *caute si non caste*, proceed cautiously, if not chastely; if they can hide their sin from men, they take no notice whether God sees them or not; and, from wishing that he might not see, begin to suspect whether he do see; and at last arrive at those men's arrogant demand, "Who seeth us?" or that positive conclusion, Psalm xciv. 7, "The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard." But what saith the Psalmist to these brutish creatures? "He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see," ver. 9. Let these atheists know that God sees, and sets down all their secret wickedness, and will bring it forth before angels and men at the great day of reckoning. The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond,* and it can never be erased but by the blood of Christ; though, by multiplied acts of notori-

* Jer. xvii. 1.

ous sinning, some may blur the engravings of sin on the table of their heart, yet it shall be as writing with the juice of lemons, being held to the fire of God's wrath, it is as legible to the conscience as the first moment when the sin was committed. O the secret wickednesses that sinners have to reckon for ! But where are the secret prayers ? Alas, how rarely or how formally do they wait on God alone ! Custom, vain-glory, and carnal interest may put them on joining in public prayer, or family duty ; but they are strangers to this spiritual self-denying duty of closet prayer. The carnal hypocrite exposeth all his religion to open view ; he is like a house with a beautiful front, but every room within, dark ; as one saith, he is a rotten post finely gilded ; he hath dressed himself in the garb of religion, and will be as devout as the best in temple-worship ; but follow him to his closet, he cannot afford God one hour in a week ; he doth not make conscience of secret prayer : this gains him no credit with men, and therefore is little used. This, rightly performed, opens the heart to God, which the unsound professor dares not do. I shall shew hereafter, whether the hypocrite may use closet prayer, and wherein he is distinguished from a sincere Christian in that duty. At present I would reprove those that never use it, that look upon it as below them ; they either dare not be alone, or scorn to stoop so low, for the purpose of sighing out their desires to God in secret, as though they would not be indebted to the great God for any mercy ; but in their hearts and practice speak the language of those proud atheists in Jer. ii. 31, " We are lords, we will come no more unto thee ? " But, as they imagine that they are gods, and will not be indebted to our God for mercy, let them know they shall die like men, and be damned like devils. Lord, have mercy on these

poor prayerless sinners, that understand not the necessity and mystery of closet prayer, but look upon it as needless, and are ready to say, it is more to do than needs: but let them prepare to make good that desperate assertion at the bar of God's justice with flames about their ears, and let such know that God will answer their cavils against plain duty, after another manner than his ministers can do now. To which dreadful judgment, we leave them, except prevented by a speedy and sincere repentance.

SECTION II.

Professors of religion reproved.

BUT the persons to be principally reproved at present, are the professors of religion, that acknowledge this to be a duty, but grievously neglect it. I fear, God's children are not so constant and conscientious in the performance of this duty of closet prayer as they ought to be. Are not pious people guilty of frequent omissions, and intermissions, or at least of negligent performance of this duty? It was one of old Mr Dod's instructions, that at night we should ask ourselves, "Have I twice this day humbled myself before God in private?" And again, "How did I pray? in faith and love?"

Who goes to bed and doth not pray,
Maketh two nights to every day.—*Herbert.*

I am afraid, many of us could give but a sorry account in answer to these serious inquiries. Let us be ashamed, lay it to heart, and give God glory by repentance and reformation.

For the humbling of our hearts in this case, let me

propose these ten awakening interrogatories, that we may mourn for our neglect of this duty of closet prayer.

1. Are you not very unlike Jesus Christ? Is not he the perfect copy that we should write after? And do we not find him often in private prayer? We meet, with him in this solitary duty, sometimes in the day, sometimes in the night, sometimes all night; in a garden, in a mountain; he took all opportunities to go to his Father;* “In the days of his flesh he offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears,” Heb. v. 7. As he was a man of sorrows, so he was a man of prayer, and the sharper his sorrows, the stronger his cries, Luke xxii. 44, “Being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly:” and was not this for our example, and for our advantage? Should we not learn of him? nay, doth not our very christianity consist in our conformity to Christ? Alas, how unlike him are most of us? Shall we pass for Christians, that follow not his steps? Was it not blessed Paul’s study and ambition to be conformed to this blessed pattern? Can we imitate a better person? Was it necessary Christ should wrestle for us, and is it not as necessary we should wrestle with God for our own souls? Or, doth Christ’s praying for us excuse our pleading for ourselves? No, no, as it was for our example and benefit in the days of his flesh, so his present intercession in heaven doth both imply and encourage our praying: for we are to ask in his name, and employ our dear Advocate, that we may speed: and shall not we, as it were, set him to work, and send up our prayers to be mixed with his sweet incense? The Lord humble us for, and pardon us our neglects and omissions!

2. Are you not herein very unlike the saints of God? The seed of Jacob are wrestlers with God. God hath

* Luke vi. 12. Matt. xxvi. 36.

no children still-born, they all cry, Abba Father. Jacob wrestled with God in secret prayer, and ever since, all the saints in all ages have borne that name, Psalm xxiv. 6, "This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob," that is, who seek the God of Jacob, as Jacob did; and indeed every one that is godly will thus pray.* There might be brought a cloud of witnesses in all ages, of praying saints, that conversed with God in secret: it is recorded of the apostle James, that his knees were as hard as camel's feet with praying. Some have sought out for private places to pray in, some have risen out of their beds to pray, some have set days apart to humble themselves in secret, by fasting and prayer, others would never venture on business without seeking God: such as are acquainted with ecclesiastical history, or christian experience, may find store of instances of this sort: and why should we be unlike our brethren? Have we not all one spirit, as well as all one Father? and is not this a spirit of grace and supplication? and is it not that which on all occasions draws the soul to its Father? God said of Paul, when newly converted, "Behold he prayeth!"—Acts ix. 11: others do not see it, but I know it; there he is in retirement, sighing and seeking me; go, Ananias, inquire for him, he is now one of you, a real convert, for, "Behold he prayeth." A soul praying in secret is worthy of observation, there is an *ecce* put upon it, "*Behold he prayeth!*" And why should we that pretend to be Christians, be unlike our brethren?

3. Are you not herein unlike yourselves in former times? When God did at first work upon your hearts, did you not then run to God privately? Did you not set yourselves intently to the duty of secret prayer? How often did God find you by yourselves, sighing,

* Psalm xxxii. 6.

sorrowing, weeping, breathing after God, pouring out your hearts like water, before the face of the Lord; when your heavenly Father pitied you, spoke very kindly to you, wiped off your tears, cheered your hearts, heard your prayers, and made those days of grief, times of love? O the sweet endearments that then took place, betwixt your souls and God! Have you forgotten such a chamber, such a closet, such a barn, such a wood, where you sometimes walked and meditated: sometimes fell prostrate and wept before the Lord, till you had no more power to weep? If you have forgotten those blessed days, your God hath not: "He remembers thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after him in a solitary wilderness," Jer. ii. 2. Canst not thou remember the day when thou wouldst rather have been with thy God in a private room, than upon a prince's throne? Yea, thou thoughtest thou wast to do nothing else but cry and pray in secret: thou wast engaged in it every day, yea many times in a day. How comes it to pass that there is such a change; that thou dost so rarely go to visit thy best friend, as formerly? Is he changed? is he not as good and kind as he was wont to be? Hast thou found any fault in God? or art not thou blame-worthy? What has become of thy ancient spirit of prayer? why dost thou forget thy sweetest wrestling-place? why dost thou not inquire for those good old ways of communion with thy God?

4. Let me further expostulate with God's children, that are rarely exercised in this duty of secret prayer. Do you not deprive yourselves of many sweet refreshments? Have not your souls had delightful experience of transporting incomes in secret duties? How many pleasant morsels have you eaten alone? Have not these stolen waters been sweet? and would they not

be so again if you would open the same sluice? O what endearments of love might your souls have, that no creature would know of! Secret influences are conveyed to souls in secret duties; these you block up by neglect. Ah, sirs, are the consolations of God small to you? Is communion with God of no worth? Why are you so unwilling to take pains to go to your Father, especially when you know he hath a kindness for you? Have you ever lost by this duty? Will not your profit infinitely countervail your pains? Ask those that use it most, they will tell you it is the happiest time they spend; yea, cannot your own experience attest it? Did you ever lose your labour when you set yourselves about the exercise in good earnest? Hath not this close and privy commerce with God brought in much spiritual gain? Beloved friends, you little consider the good you miss for want of performing this excellent duty: but that is not all.

5. Do you not by neglect of secret prayer expose yourselves to many sad temptations? Watching and prayer are singular helps against temptation, Matt. xxvi. 41. It has been said, and what wonder, that Satan hath professed, that he hath watched when some of God's children have gone out without closet prayer, and that day he hath gotten great advantage against them, sometimes by tripping up their heels and casting them down from their excellency, into some gross iniquity; sometimes by tormenting their hearts with blasphemous, or soul-perplexing injections: sometimes God hath left them to fall into some afflictive snare, laid by this subtle fowler, which hath cost them many bitter pangs, all this and much more hath been the fruit of such neglects. Christians, have you not found this too true by sad experience? When you have gone abroad without calling on God, hath not

God secretly withdrawn from you? hath not Satan obtained his designs upon you? have not your hearts been growing out of frame? some lust increasing, grace decaying, and your souls at the brink of some astonishing fall? When you have gone out in the morning without a portion of spiritual food from God, has not this state of emptiness been to the prejudice of your souls' health? If you engage not God by prayer to go with you, what security have you for that day? If God leave you, the devil may do what he list with you, and hamper you in a thousand snares and sins.

6 Doth not your neglect of secret prayer argue little love to God, or delight to be in his company? When persons have a strong affection for each other, they love to be together. Love delights in union and communion; yea, when persons love devotedly, they withdraw from other company, that they may enjoy each other with more endeared familiarity; the presence of a third person mixeth the streams of communication, and mars their intimate communion; and if you did supremely love the Lord, would you not withdraw from others, that your souls might enjoy some fresh and refreshing intercourse with your best beloved? How can you say, you love him, when you have no desire for his company? If you did indeed love him, you would hold him, and not let him go, until you had (with the spouse,) brought him into the chambers of intimate communion, and solitary recesses: love is the gravity of the soul,* and draws it to the object beloved. If your hearts were captivated with him, you would take more pleasure in conversing with him, you would bless God for an opportunity of enjoying him; but this strangeness speaks a great defect in this noble grace. And would you be esteemed such as love not God?

* Cant. iii. 4. Amor meus, pondus meum.

What a sad thing is it to be low and deficient in love to God under such strong engagements to love? Poor soul! have not those silken cords of love which have been cast about thee, drawn thee nearer, and bound thee faster to thy God than thus? Have not such bellows and incentives, kindled and increased thy spark of love into a flame? Lament thy sin, and shame thyself before thy God, for this decay of love, and dangerous neglect.

7. Do not you by these omissions declare yourselves ungrateful for the grace of God? It is God's way to engage souls to approach to him, by holding out promises of reward, as we offer apples, fruit, &c. to children, to entice them to us; nor is it a bait to cozen and ensnare us, but real offers of kindness to us, whereof we may partake, and wherewith we may be happy. Suppose a prince desire a beggar's company, with expressions of great affection, and promises of many kindnesses; is it not ingratitude, if he fling away, and scorn the invitation? Or, suppose a potent person send to a poor man a kind message, telling him he hath considered his case, and hath appointed time and place, that they two together may confer about the necessary concerns of this poor man; that he shall have free admission and liberty without disturbance to present his petition, and ask what he will, and it shall be granted; that none shall be present, but only they two shall converse familiarly together, for the good of the poor man: but if, instead of a thankful acceptance of this kindness, the poor man picks a quarrel with the messenger or message, grows sullen and perverse, runs away and saith, I need neither his counsel nor assistance; let him bestow his kindness where he will, I will not meddle with him: were not this gross ingratitude, and how would it be taken?

The case is thine Christian, that neglectest secret duties; the God of heaven gives thee notice to meet him in such a place, to negotiate freely the main concerns of thy precious soul, and thou art backward and shy, and wilt not come near him, but either plainly deniest, or heedlessly delayest. Oh monstrous folly! Oh black ingratitude! Be ashamed of it, be humbled for it, thy God takes it ill that thou art so loath to be happy, that thou even forsakest thine own mercies, and wilt go twice as far another way to gratify a friend, rather than go into thy closet to please thy God and profit thy poor soul. How long must God watch and wait, and strive and sue, to have thy company, and thou dost still neglect and grow averse thereto? O be ashamed of it.

8. Do you not, by neglect of secret prayer, resist the motions of the blessed Spirit? and is this no fault? Is it nothing to neglect communion with God the Father, or to improve the intercession of Jesus Christ the mediator, but you must also slight the motions of God, the blessed Spirit? this is sad. How often doth the Holy Ghost knock at your doors, stir you up, spur you forwards unto duty, and take you by the hand, offering his assistance if you will go to God—and yet do you refuse? Do you make nothing of quenching, grieving, yea vexing the good Spirit of God? Consider what you do: as you deal with him, so he will deal with you; if you do not embrace his call, perhaps he will not be present at your call: and what can you do in duty, without him? If you strive against him, he will cease striving with you: be it known to you, you have not this heavenly wind at your command; and you may toss in the boat of duty long, but shall not approach the port without it: nothing but the Spirit of God can carry thy soul to God: and what can excite and comfort thee when thy assistant and

comforter is slighted and saddened? Grieve therefore, Christian, for thy grieving of the Spirit, lay to heart thy careless quenching of this holy fire; and let those waters of sensuality or negligence cost thee the waters of godly sorrow and repentance, that this sin may not be laid to thy charge. Say as that divine poet.—

And art thou grieved, sweet and sacred Dove,
 When I am sour,
 And cross thy love?
 Griev'd for me? The God of strength and power!
 Griev'd for a worm? which when I tread,
 I pass away and leave it dead.—*Herbert.*

9. If you can only pray in company, what will you do when your company is gone? A time may come when you may be left alone, as Christ saith he was. You had need to engage the Father to be with you, that you may say as the apostle, 1 John i. 3, “Truly our fellowship is with the Father.” It is true, communion of saints is desirable, but external communion is not always attainable, you may be thrust out by divine providence: now it is a sad thing to be at a loss when persons are alone. It is a strange expression of some, that they know not how to live, if such and such christian friends or godly relations be taken away; why, what is the matter? Are they in the place of God? Is your spiritual life maintained by the leaden pipes, or by the living springs that stream through them? Alas, sirs, if you more understood and used this art of drawing influences from God immediately through Christ by secret prayer, you would not be so discouraged with the loss of friends; you would say, indeed it is true, my loss is great, such a one had a notable gift in prayer, and spoke my very heart to God, but though he be gone, is my God gone? Is prayer gone? Though I cannot employ such moving expressions as

such a one had, yet I have opened my heart to God as I could in secret formerly, and there is the same refuge now, the same road into this city and sanctuary, and therefore all my comfort is not gone, blessed be God. But a poor soul that hath leaned upon the staff of others' enlargements will be severely put to it when that staff is gone: and, is it not a great disparagement to a noble and immortal soul, that it cannot treat and entertain its God alone? What, cannot God and a heaven-born soul converse together without auxiliaries? Must another interpose as an instrument, without whom you cannot enjoy communion with God? Be ashamed of it, and chide yourselves, as not acting suitably to your rational powers, much less to a supernatural principle of grace.

Lastly, let me further demand of you—what, if our Lord should call you away and find you under the guilt of neglecting this known duty? What confusion, grief, and jealousy would possess you if death should arrest you in such state? What a hurry was forlorn Saul in, when the Philistines were upon him, and he had not offered sacrifice unto God? And what a desperate plunge will you be put to, when the king of terrors is upon you, and you have not personally and privately been seeking God? Though you may be right and safe for the main, yet your spirits will be much perplexed, and you will suffer shrewd rebukes from your own consciences for your omission, and will be put to that last prayer of a dying saint eminent in the church, “The Lord forgive me my sins of omission;” and possibly may want that spiritual solace in a dying hour that praying souls may have. O what a blessed thing will it be, if our dear Redeemer find a believer upon his knees before the Lord! O the hearty welcome he will give unto his God! This is

the time he waited for, he was got into a corner, was sighing over his sins, pleading for mercy, breathing after grace, and panting for glory, and behold, what a quick return doth his God make! even while he is speaking and praying the Lord doth send a guard of angels to conduct the soul into eternal mansions, where God and the soul shall part no more. Blessed for ever is that servant whom his Lord, when he cometh shall find so doing! Now consider of it, which state would you be found in? And do not you know, his coming may be sudden and unexpected? Would you be found under neglect, or in the faithful performance of duty? Would you not be carried from your closet devotions, to eternal communion with God? O then take our Lord's most wholesome counsel, "Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is."—Mark xiii. 33.

I might here challenge Christians also, not only for their neglect, but careless performance of this duty of closet prayer: with what sorry shifts do we put off God? how hard, dead, unbelieving, distracted are our hearts in secret? God takes much pleasure in adverbs; it pleaseth not God that a duty be done, except it be well done. Many satisfy their own consciences that they have prayed, but consider not how they have prayed. There is a curse on such as do the work of God negligently; and, that have in their flock a male, and offer to the Lord a corrupt thing.* And it is a fearful thing to get a curse upon our knees, when we come for a blessing. Look to it, God takes notice how you pray; the devil stands under your closet window, and heareth what you say to God in secret, all the while studying how he may commence a suit against you for your duty; like those that come to sermons

* Jer. xlviii. 10. Mal. i. 14.

to carp or catch at what the preacher saith ; or as one saith, like a cunning opponent in the schools, while his adversary is busy reading his position, he is studying to confute it ; and oh, what advantage do we often give Satan to trip us and make us tardy ? What occasion do we afford him to accuse us to God and to ourselves, while we have our filthy garments on us ? Yea, remissness in our duties brings decay in grace. Tradesmen may go behind-hand by being careless in their dealings, as well as by being much out of their shops. Alas, what sad decay is in our souls for want of close and constant communion with God ! We have very perverse hearts, we have much ado with them ; when we would do good, evil is present. It is our great sin we are so much out of order, even upon our knees. Satan sends his imps to haunt and torment us, he jogs our hand when we are to write a letter to heaven in prayer, so that we can scarcely make sense of what we present to God. Our thoughts are unfixed, ranging abroad like a spaniel to a thousand objects, so that sometimes we have lost ourselves, and know not where we are. Oh let us lament our vain and trifling spirit in secret duties, and turn unto God for help, as a servant when the child he tends is troublesome, and will not be ruled by him, calls out to the father to come to him, who no sooner speaks the word, but all is hushed with him ; our God can set in order our unruly spirits, only he will be called upon by earnest prayer.

CHAP. V.

INSTRUCTIONS RELATIVE TO THE DEVOTIONS OF THE CLOSET.

SECTION I.

On Preparation.

MY next and main business is to furnish assistance in the duty of closet prayer, by proposing some helps and rules for direction, which I shall reduce to these four heads : namely,

Preparatives to it,—essentials in it,—circumstances about it,—and consequences upon it. To prepare :—

1. Look to your state before God. If you be not real saints, you are not fit for this spiritual duty. Your relation must be changed by converting grace ; hence the text saith, “Pray to thy Father.” See then that God be your Father in Jesus Christ, else you cannot truly cry, Abba Father. If we must be reconciled to our brother before we offer our gifts, much more to God, for how can two walk together except they be agreed ? I deny not but an unregenerate person should withdraw himself into retirement, examine his state, fall down on his knees, and beg converting and pardoning grace, and thus men should acquaint themselves with God, that they may come before him ; for depraved, unconverted sinners, have no right as children to call to the King of heaven, though as creatures they may and must seek unto God, yet they worship afar off. It is the gracious Christian only, that prayeth acceptably : wicked men’s prayers are an abomination ; an hypocrite shall not come before him.—Job xiii. 16. And, indeed,

till you be real saints, you will have no mind to buckle close to this duty: truth of grace will capacitate you for secret approaches to God; strength of grace will elevate you to God; and evidence of sincerity will make you come boldly to the throne of grace. Therefore try your state, inquire what relation you have to God, or else expect no familiarity with him. God will not take the wicked by the hand to lead them into these chambers of communion, the throne of iniquity hath no fellowship with him. Our Lord Jesus marrieth none but widows that are divorced from all other husbands, and he opens his heart to none but his betrothed spouse. O sirs! come over without reserve to God, by closing with Christ, renounce yourselves, be united to him, and then come and welcome to enjoy communion with him in closet prayer.

2. Discard other things from your hearts and hands, let not your earthly transactions intrude into your closet exercises; say to the concerns and affairs of the world as Abraham to his servants, "Stay there while I go and worship the Lord yonder," or as Nehemiah in another case, "I am doing a great work, and I cannot come down to you:" so do thou say, I have appointed other times and seasons for attending worldly business, let me alone with my God, every thing is beautiful in its season, communion with God is as much as I can attend to at once, I must not be diverted by other objects, the business I am about is of the greatest importance, I must consult how I may attend upon the Lord without distraction, and worldly matters have distracted me in God's service, and have cost me many a tear; therefore get away from me. Why should the work of the Lord cease? Why should I be kept from my God? What can you afford me that can be worth one hour's communion with him? Thus do you

actually renounce the world, for you cannot mind two things at once ; and observe it, if you leave any matters of the world tarrying for your attendance, the thoughts of them will attend you, and make you cut your duties short, and run away before your hearts be warmed ; therefore, if it may be, dispatch them, rid your hearts of them. The heathen left their shoes at the temple doors, to shew that all earthly concerns and affections must be left behind when we go to God.

Let vain or busy thoughts have there no part,
 Bring not thy plough, thy plots, thy pleasures thither ;
 Christ purg'd his temple, so must thou thy heart,
 All worldly thoughts are but thieves met together
 To cozen thee.—*Herbert.*

3. Set yourselves in God's presence. Although you be not within the view of any mortal creature, yet the eternal God sees what you are going about. So saith the text—"Your Father sees in secret." Darkness or closeness hides not from him : and it is of more consequence that one God sees you, than if all the men on earth gazed at you. His eyes are ten thousand times brighter than the sun, and "he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity;" therefore wash your hands in innocency before you compass his altar : for if you regard iniquity in your heart, God will not hear your prayer.* Set the Lord always before you, especially when you are setting yourselves before the Lord. If that caveat was enough to beget reverence in a heathen, "Cato sees thee;"† O what reverence would the sense of God's omnipresence beget in your hearts, if duly weighed ! Christians, impress your spirits with such meditations as these—God's eye is never off me, I am daily walking in the sun ; but now I am setting

* Hab. i. 13. Psal. xxvi. 6. Psal. lxi. 13.

† Cave, spectat Cato.

myself to pray in secret, I come to appear before God in a special manner. I may deceive men and myself, but God will not be mocked : I had need now engage my heart to approach unto God ; that is the thing he looks for. O for a spirit suitable to the worship of such majesty ! Lord, draw out my affections, unite my heart, excite my graces, that my whole soul may be carried out after thee. Thus “commit thy works to the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.”* When thou art setting thy face towards a duty, where thou art sure to meet Satan, and to carry with thee a corrupt deceitful heart, let God know from thy mouth whither thou art going, and what thy fears are. Never (saith one) doth the soul march in so good order, as when it puts itself under the conduct of God ; and never is it so full of awe, as when it sets itself under the eye of God. “I am God Almighty, walk before me, and be thou perfect,” Gen. xvii. 1. When you sensibly discern that you are kneeling before God, will not this make you perfect, and sincere, and more holy ? If you think God be not in your closets, what do you go to pray there for ? And if you know he sees you there, why do you not think so, and set yourselves as in his presence ? The child will stand gravely before his father, the scholar before his master ; and so will the gracious soul before God in duty, if sensible of his presence.

4. Collect and compose your thoughts. Our thoughts and affections are like the strings of an instrument out of tune, and therefore we must take some pains to regulate them. This is that which Zophar adviseth, Job xi. 13, to prepare the heart, and then stretch forth the hands. And for this end, it would not be amiss when you come into a private room to pray in

* Psal. xxxvii. 5. Prov. xvi. 3.

secret; first to read some portion of scripture, which may be of use to compose your spirits: and like David's harp in Saul's case, drive away your wild imaginations; yea, the word read, may afford you suitable matter of prayer to God. More particularly, let me recommend one tried and approved expedient, which is this; when you are addressing yourselves to God in secret prayer, endeavour to fix your thoughts upon some particular subject to enlarge upon: there is no question, but you have sometimes one special errand to God, sometimes another, if you observe your circumstances well; be sure to mind that; whether it be to confess some predominant sin, to beg pardon of it, or power against it; you may have some grace in your eye, some grace that you need more than ordinarily, and see your weakness and defect therein, &c. Now do not satisfy yourselves in running out into general supplications only, but set yourselves to plead the cause of your souls in that very case, which you have found out by serious inquiry, should most engage you at that time to approach God, expatiate principally upon that subject: and this I conceive to be a taking to ourselves words* (which the Holy Ghost directeth us to employ in prayer,) not a form of such and such phrases, but some special subject matter on which to address God; the word in Hebrew imports so much.†

Now an intent and earnest pursuit of such a special consideration at the throne of grace is of use in these two respects:

(1.) You will find it a help against distractions, wanderings, withdrawals from God. When you purposely set yourselves to mind one thing, you will be more intent upon it, than when you allow yourselves liberty in variety of matter. When the stream runs

* Hos. xiv. 2. † רבך Verbum, res, negotium.—*Vid. Buxt. Lex.*

one way, it is stronger than when dispersed in several channels,* so, when the Christian unites his strength to plead with God on a particular business, he is usually more warm and affectionate, and so less subject to distraction.

(2.) It will enable you to enlarge when spreading particular cases before the Lord, in correct and proper expressions, even before others as you have a call and opportunity; and this is that which is called the gift of prayer, which is of singular use, when a person can particularly and pathetically spread out a case, plead with God, improve promises, and rationally expostulate even with the Almighty on a spiritual or temporal concernment; this holy art is obtained by frequency in secret prayer, and particularly pleading for a man's own soul. This is the last preparative; think beforehand what special business you have in your approach to God; let this be a settled consideration, you cannot think to speak of all things to God at one time, but take that which is of present urgent use and importance, and set yourselves to enlarge upon that; follow that home till you feel your hearts to be warmed and affected, and so have some tokens for good that God will return a gracious answer. You will say, must we thus prepare ourselves before every duty of secret prayer? can we have time for it? I shall answer this in the words of my dear and reverend father Angier:†—"There are some separating duties that prepare for others, as examination, meditation, prayer; and they do prepare by stirring up the grace of God, and providing a heavenly assistance to begin with us in the duty. If thou canst not always have separating time betwixt other occa-

* *Vis unita fortior.*

† His book called, *A Help to Better Hearts for Better Times*, pag. 196, 197; read more on this subject.

sions and God's worship, yet have some separating thoughts ere thou enter upon the duty, thou art not fit else to meddle with wisdom." Thus he expresses himself. It is true, some have not the leisure that others have, yet so much preparation is necessary for every duty as may withdraw the heart from other objects, and impress the spirit with a due sense of the work we have in hand, and sometimes this may be done speedily; yet as for such as have more time to work upon their hearts, and state their soul's case by mustering up themselves to the work, by not doing it they neglect a duty and cannot warrantably expect the Lord's presence: and this I conceive is the reason why the Lord's people miss of God in secret prayer, at least is one reason because they do not make such conscience, and take such care of preparing their hearts as they ought. Ah Christians, when you come into your closet, sit down and pause a little, before you fall down upon your knees, consider your state, shake off your business, set yourselves in God's presence, and muster up the sins or wants or mercies, you purpose to spread before the Lord: a client will consider all his matters, before he come to state his case to his advocate; a poor patient will bethink himself how he is, that he may tell his ailings to his physician; and a petitioner will not go hand over head to his prince, but order his cause before-hand, that he may plead it more effectually—and shall not we much more prepare ourselves to wait upon the God of heaven?

SECTION II.

Directions respecting what is essential to Secret Prayer.

ANOTHER class of rules regards some things essentially requisite to the right performance of devo-

tional exercises in private, which you are to look to in the duty ; and those are such as are required in every description of prayer : namely,

That it be performed with the heart—by the help of the Spirit—according to God's will—and in the name of Christ.

1. Secret prayer must be the prayer of the heart. A heartless duty is a worthless duty; yea, the whole heart must be engaged in it, Psal. cxix. 10, "With my whole heart have I sought thee." It is the heart that God chiefly looks after, Prov. xxiii. 26, "My son, give me thy heart." Nothing else can please God, if the heart be wanting; if the heart be engaged in the duty, he will rather dispense with other weaknesses, where there is not wilful negligence. Observe it, in that worship of God we perform with others, a man's gift may be of use, though his heart go not along with his voice; but in closet prayer it doth no good at all, except the heart be engaged; therefore God *principally* requires the heart in other duties, in this he requires the heart *only*, for the voice is not necessary. To love and serve the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, strength, is a keeping of the law,* and more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. We should pray with every faculty of the soul, and with the utmost power of every faculty. God deserves and requires our strongest affections. That is but a vain worship which is performed without the heart;† right attendance on God is an engaging the heart to approach to him.‡ Christians, in all your addresses to God, mind the object of worship; let the subject worshipping, and object worshipped, be closely united; look beyond the duty. It is one thing to have communion with an ordinance, and another thing to have communion with

* Mark xii. 30, 33.

† Matt. xv. 8, 9.

‡ Jer. xxx. 21.

God in an ordinance. God's dear children know what this means; for sometimes they are more taken up with expressions, affections, or some accidental things in the performance, than with the object of worship they should be intent upon; but this is very dangerous, for whatsoever interposeth betwixt the soul and God, to divert the thoughts from him, is an idol: Ezek. xiv. 3, "These men have set up their idols in their hearts." The Septuagint reads it,* they have put their thoughts upon their hearts, that is, they have committed idolatry with their own imaginations, instead of worshipping God, their minds have fixed on something short of God, after which they have, as it were, been adulterous even in their duty. I shall not give that as the sense of the place, yet the observation may be useful. I fear many of us are guilty of a kind of spiritual fine-spun idolatry, by heterogeneous thoughts in holy duties, that draw us back from God, when we are approaching to him. The Lord humble us for this, and fix our thoughts upon God, that we may say as the church, Isa. xxvi. 8, "The desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee." Cyprian saith,† Every secular thought must depart, and the mind must be taken up with nothing but what we are about; he tells, the practice of the church in his time was, that the minister before prayer, prepares the people's minds, saying *sursum corda*, lift up your hearts, and they answer *habemus ad Dominum*, we have them up to the Lord; whereby,

* Οἱτοὶ ἄνδρες ἐθεντο τὰ διανοήματα αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὰς καρδίας αὐτῶν.—*Sept.*

† Cogitatio omnis secularis et carnalis cedeat, nec quicquam tunc animus, quam id solum cogitet quod precatur: ideo et sacerdos, ante orationem prefatione præmissa, parat fratrum mentes, dicendo, Sursum corda, et respondet plebs, Habemus ad Dominum, ab hoc monetur nihil aliud nos, quam Dominum cogitare debere.—*Cyp. Serm. de Orat. Dom. p. 246.*

saith he, we are admonished, that in prayer we must think of nothing but the Lord. What the minister said to the people, do you say to yourselves, *sursum corda*, lift up your hearts ; let every one say, I am now worshipping a heart-searching God, O that my heart were with God. The ancients (saith Luther,*) finely described prayer, to be an ascent of the mind to God : O that I did experimentally know what this means, by uniting my heart to God. Lord, gather in my roving and wandering thoughts. This is the first direction, mind the frame of your hearts.

2. Implore and expect the Spirit's assistance.—Prayer must be by the Spirit's enlarging influence ; hence it is called "the spirit of grace and supplication : "† it helps our infirmities by making our souls cry out, Abba, Father, ‡ with unutterable groans. A Christian should spread the sails of his soul for the gales of God's grace, which would carry him apace towards God, yea and make his prayers reach the ear of God, for he knoweth the mind of the spirit. This is that which is called, a worshipping God in the spirit, a praying in the Holy Ghost ; || that is, either as to the matter of the prayer dictated by the Spirit, or as to the manner of praying, the soul being actuated by the Holy Ghost : for I conceive it may import the former as well as the latter, as other scriptures compared fully imply. § Alas, flesh and blood will put up such petitions as God will not accept, or in such a manner as is no way suitable to his spiritual nature. The truth is, Christians, you will but bungle at the work without this help of God's Spirit, and God will take no notice of you except he hear his own language. Do not

* *Ascensus mentis ad Deum.*—*Luth. Colloq. Myst. fol. 239.*

† Zech. xii. 10. ‡ Rom. viii. 26. || Phil. iii. 3. Jude 20.

§ See Mark xii. 36. and xiii. 11.

think you can wrestle out the business yourselves ; you must be indebted to God for help in prayer, as well as for hearing your prayers. Your own spirits will not carry you to heaven : that which is from the earth is earthly, and riseth no higher than earth ; but the Holy Ghost will elevate your souls to God. Therefore, I beseech you, sirs, supplicate the Spirit, yield to its influence, improve its operations ; say when you are going to duty, Lord, now stir up thyself, and stir up thy grace in my heart : “Awake, O north wind ; and come, thou south ; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out,” Cant. iv. 16 ; that graces may be exercised and exerted. Lord, I am low, flat, unfeeling ; send the powerful arm of thy blessed Spirit to work all gracious dispositions in me, and raise up my affections to thee. I see I am below the duty, and infinitely below thee in the duty ; but thou, and thou alone canst raise me up, quicken, soften my dead and rocky heart. Come, Lord, and show thy powerful arm ; let it appear what God can do for a poor worm. O lift me up to thee, that my soul may enjoy some sweet communion with thee. Send thy Spirit to fetch in my roaming wandering heart. O for some fire from heaven to burn up my sacrifice, or else it will lie as a piece of flesh, and be no true holocaust, or pure incense before thee. Let thy Spirit scatter these mists of ignorance, and drive away these flies of distracting thoughts, that my heart may be with thee, and my performance may be a sweet savour unto God.

3. It is also an important quality of prayer, that it be according to God’s will. It must have a warrant from the Word ; a word of precept, or promise, or example, must be the ground of our petitions : a command is our warrant, a promise our encouragement, an example is our track, and the footsteps of the flock

wherein we must walk. He that asks amiss shall not speed, but if we ask any thing according to God's will he heareth us, and then we know we have the petitions that we desired of him, 1 John v. 14, 15. Now, we ask according to his will, when both the matter of our petition is right, and our end in asking is God's glory, and our own or others' spiritual good : otherwise, if we ask of God what we conceit to be a mercy, and have not asked counsel at God's mouth ; or ask so as to consume it on our lusts, we may well meet with a denial. My friends, you may not say what you please in the presence of God. " Consider, God is in heaven, you are on earth, therefore be not rash with your mouth, and let not your heart be hasty to utter any thing before God, let your words be few," and well weighed.—Eccles. v. 2. The work you are about is a solemn business ; do not ramble in extravagant desires after unlawful things ; think not that God will patronize your lusts : and when you *have asked* that which you conceive is according to his will, refer it wholly to his will, say, the will of the Lord be done : submit yourselves to his disposal, for time, manner, means, and all circumstances in giving it : ask temporal mercies conditionally, and spiritual comforts with submission to God's will : learn that petition, " Thy will be done," to pray it as well as say it. Indeed Luther could say, " Let my will be done ;" but he came off with this— "*My will*, Lord, because my will is melted into thine, there is but one will betwixt us." Let God's will be your will ; it is fit it should be so, our heavenly Father is wiser than we. Consider, a man cannot pray in faith, for that which he hath no warrant to ask. Besides, Amesius saith, " If a man come not with an humble submission to God's will, it were not a religious prayer directed to the supreme Creator, but a kind of

command by a superior to an inferior, or a familiar discourse as amongst equals :”* therefore let us humbly plead God’s will as Abraham did, Gen. xviii. 27. Further consider, the design of prayer is not to incline God before unwilling, to our mind and desire, for with him there is no variableness nor shadow of change ; but that we may obtain of him by prayer what we know before-hand he is willing to give. Lastly, consider Christ’s example : Matt. xxvi. 39, “ If it be possible, let this cup pass from me ; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.” This is right praying, to ground our petition upon a promise, yet freely to leave all at God’s feet, to dispose of us as he sees good. Our prayers and God’s promises should point towards each other as intended for correspondence ; promises do bend downwards, and to approach them, our prayers must ascend upwards, so will there be a blessed harmony and seasonable return.

4. Place dependance on your Advocate ; John xiv. 13, “ Whatsoever you ask in my name, that will I do.” To ask any thing in his name, is not rudely, customarily, or by way of compliment to conclude with these words—“ through Jesus Christ our Lord,” &c. but, in confidence of his merit and intercession, to call upon our heavenly Father, as Daniel pleads, “ for the Lord’s sake,” Dan. ix. 17. For, since the fall, none can come immediately to God but through a mediator ; nor are we to fetch a compass by the groundless invocation of saints and angels. I hope you have otherwise learned Christ. I am most afraid in the practical part, that, in particu-

* *Hæc representatio debet esse submissa et humilis: alias enim non esset precatio religiosa, à creaturâ subdita ad supremum Numen et Creatorem directâ ; sed vel imperium superioris erga inferiorem, vel quasi familiaris collocutio, qualis est inter æquales.—Ames. Medull. Theol. lib. 2. c. 9. p. 251.*

lar acts at least, precious souls are in danger to miscarry, especially in closet prayer. When a Christian is alone, and there finds a sweet gale of the blessed Spirit, inclining his heart to mourn for sin, to bewail his misery, to plead for mercy, and to give God the glory due unto his name; O then he goes away much satisfied, and God must needs accept his person and hear his prayer. Why so? Why, he hath found abundant assistance, melting frames, and enlargements. Alas, sirs, where is Christ all this while? I am afraid your advocate is quite forgotten, your surety is set aside as a poor insignificant cipher. And tell me, friend, thou that boastest thus of thy enlargements, darest thou appear before a holy God in those rags? Suppose thy rags be velvet, they are but rags still, and are too scanty a garment for thy naked soul; thou comest to gain the ear of God and open his heart, in a wrong way; we are accepted only in the Beloved, and not because we are enlarged. It is true, evangelical assistance may be a sign of acceptance, but it is no cause thereof; no, no, our persons and prayers are owned only on account of our surety and intercessor. Our dear Lord Jesus, who died for us, has stationed himself at the court of heaven as our ambassador, to plead for us, and to see matters carried fairly betwixt God and ransomed souls—and shall we not employ our advocate, and find him work? or shall we think to go our own errand? Lord, forgive this black ingratitude. O Christians, whatever your straitness or enlargements be, make use of him who is at God's right hand; place your sacrifices on this golden altar; lay the whole stress of your acceptance upon Christ's meritorious intercession; act faith on him who mingles his sweet incense with your poor performances. O look after our Aaron who is gone into the Holy of

holies for us. Consider, friends, it would be a sad thing for you if you were to be judged according to the best secret duties that ever you performed. It is good to have an enlarged heart in secret, yet there is danger in it, and it may undo us, because our foolish hearts are apt to boast of, and trust to our good frames; therefore it is better for us to be sometimes straitened, than constantly enlarged in our closet prayers. This is what hath made some say that their duties have done them more hurt than their infirmities; and the reason is plain, because our corrupt hearts are so apt to depend upon the former, whereas we are daunted and emptied of ourselves by considering the latter. The Lord help us all in this important business of prayer, yea this principal part of our religion, to depend wholly upon the righteousness and intercession of Jesus Christ, for access to, and acceptance with God. Study these Scriptures, John xvi. 23, 24. Eph. iii. 12. Heb. iv. 15, 16. x. 19—22. Phil. iii. 3. The gospel is full of this, yea, this is the main hinge of our religion: you are not Christians unless you acknowledge Jehovah your righteousness in all that you do, as well as make God your ultimate end: you will go away as the proud Pharisee without acceptance, if you plead your enlargements with God: but if you come as the Publican, pleading only God's mercy, and Christ's merits, you shall be owned and crowned with abundant incomes.

There are also several other necessary ingredients in all prayer, which I might urge with reference to this duty of secret prayer; as,

(1.) A right understanding, 1 Cor. xiv. 15, "I will pray with the understanding;" for blind devotion is not pleasing to God.

(2.) A sensible perception of our wants; we must come

weary and heavy laden, Matt. xi. 28; burdened with the guilt of sin, distressed for want of grace.

(3.) Fervency of spirit, James v. 17, arising from a consideration of the necessity and excellency of what we desire.

(4.) A reverent disposition, Eccl. v. 2; an unfeigned abasing of ourselves before God, from the sense of his infinite majesty and our own unworthiness.

(5.) Secret persuasions of prevailing, 1 Tim. ii. 8. grounded on God's all-sufficiency and fidelity, though we be unworthy.

(6.) A charitable disposition, forgiving others, Matt. vi. 14, and especially having an endeared affection for all saints.

(7.) Perseverance in prayer, holding on without cessation, Eph. vi. 18, following God in the duty all our days.

Such constituent qualities as these are essentially requisite in the duty of prayer.

SECTION III.

The Circumstances of Secret Prayer.

THESE circumstances may be a great furtherance or hinderance in this performance. They are four:

Place, posture, season, and voice.

I shall but briefly advert to these.

1. With respect to *place*, I advise you to choose the most retired room, where you may be freest from disturbance, that you may not hear the noise of the family or distracting commotions of a tumultuous world. Be not curious in the choice of a place, if only it accomplish your end for secrecy or retirement; no matter how homely it be, the sweetness of the company will

compensate for the meanness of the place. If you have not a convenient room within doors, yet a pious heart will not disdain to go and meet its beloved Lord in any cote, or barn, or wood. "Isaac walked out into the fields to pray and meditate." See you choose a private place wherever it be, according to the nature of the duty, before opened to you. Observe God's providences in disposing of you, and accept such place as he shall offer.

2. For *posture*, in general, see that what you adopt be humble. There are examples of several laudable gestures in prayer. Sometimes we find saints standing, ordinarily kneeling, spreading forth their hands, lifting up their eyes towards heaven; sometimes prostrating the body all along upon the earth before the Lord. You may do in this as you find most advantageous in your experience: no invariable rules can be given as to these particular circumstances; only see that your closet prayers be with as much reverence as if you were before others. Consider, your bodies are God's, and must be presented as a sacrifice to God: he will be worshipped with the outward as well as inward man; you cannot, without dangerous sacrilege, rob him of either. Besides, observe it, there are both evidence and assistance in the body's humble gesture; it is a help to make you humble, and it is a sign that you are humble: but, on the contrary, an unsuitable sight and position of the body in God's service, is a sad sign of an unhumiliated soul, and prevents humiliation. Therefore though you be never so solitary, yet remember, your Father in heaven sees you; therefore, as Cyprian exhorts,* let us consider we stand under the view of

* Cogitemus, nos sub conspectu Dei stare; placendum est Divinis oculis, et habitu corporis et modo vocis.—*Cyp. Serm. in Orat. Dom. p. 409.*

God, and we should seek to please him, both in the habit of our body and manner of our voice. Think of this rule.

3. In reference to *the season*, the apostle saith, "Pray continually, or without ceasing." Yet there are some, as it were, canonical hours of prayer, wherein a Christian's discretion must interpose; only, in this case, take the fittest seasons for secret prayer, as when you are most at leisure from worldly business, most free from company, least in danger of drowsiness. O Christians, if it be possible, put not off your secret devotions too long, till you go to bed, then you are fitter for rest and sleep than for wrestling with God on your knees. And then, for the frequency of this exercise, no certain rule can be given. David and Daniel "prayed three times a day," morning, noon, and night.* Noon-time was the sixth hour, which was also a time of prayer, Acts x. 9; others also observed the ninth hour, which was three o'clock in the afternoon,† Acts iii. 1. Certainly the third hour, that is, nine in the morning, was an hour of prayer, Acts ii. 15, and so was evening, six at night, say some. David adds a seventh in Psalm cxix. 164, "Seven times a day will I praise thee;" which may only denote frequency in the duty. Some of these may seem extraordinary cases. The ordinary seasons the saints have taken, have been morning and evening, as the Jews sacrificed a lamb at those seasons.‡ In the morning our spirits are fresh and lively; at evening we may find the past affairs of the day a fit occasion for prayer and praise. It would do well to take Isaac's season for devotion, even about sun-set, or the shutting in of the day. But I shall not

* Psalm lv. 17. Dan. vi. 10.

† Dr. Ham. Pract. Cat. l. 3, sect. 2, p. 274.

‡ Exod. xxix. 38, 39. Psalm v. 3, lxxxviii. 13, and cxli. 2.

too peremptorily impose in these undetermined circumstances, only take that general rule, "Watch unto prayer," 1 Pet. iv. 7.

4. In regard to *the voice*. The articulate sound of words is not absolutely necessary in prayer, and it may not be so convenient in closet prayer, which should be managed privately betwixt God and a man's own soul, approving the heart to God as sole witness of his sincerity; except, through some extacy and strong emotion of the affections, the soul's desires break out on the lips beyond its first intentions. I know, Mr. John Carter, that eminent man of God, did purposely use his voice in secret prayer for these two reasons, (1.) Because he found it a help to his affections; (2.) Because it was an example to his family.* I must not therefore impose any necessity in these variable circumstances; only, I humbly conceive, it is most suitable to the nature of closet prayer to perform it so as none else may take notice thereof. Give me leave to mention a few passages out of Cyprian to this purpose:†—As it is a token of impudent forwardness to make a noise with loud clamours; so it is most suitable to a modest spirit to pray with silent supplications: for God is the hearer not of the voice, but of the heart. He makes Hannah a type of the church, who prayed not with loud petitions, but with affections agitating her and rising within the recesses of her breast—she spake with hidden prayer, but manifest faith.

* Mr. Clark in his Life.

† Nam ut impudentis clamoribus strepere, ita contra congruit verecundo modestis precibus orare: quia Deus non vocis, sed cordis auditor est. *Et paulo post*: Quod Anna in primo Regum libro, ecclesie typum portans, custodit et servat, quæ Dominum non clamosâ petitione sed tacite et modeste, intra ipsas pectoris latebras, precabatur: loquebatur prece occultâ, sed manifestâ fide.—*Cypr. Serm. de Orat. Dom. p. 409, 410.*

Thus much for the circumstances of closet prayer, wherein I am more brief and hesitating, because I would not prescribe any thing to the people of God which he hath left free in his word ; only in general take notice, that though accidental circumstances which concern a duty be mutable, yet by the wise ordering of those circumstances they will become a singular assistance in the performance of the duty.

SECTION IV.

In what way attention may be profitably occupied after having been engaged in devotional exercises.

AFTER closet prayer our attention should be directed to the following things, which may be considered as incumbent upon us, and from which we may derive advantage ; namely,

We ought to observe the manner in which God deals with us—to walk suitably—to wait for returns of prayer—and to communicate the success of our intercourse with God.

1. When you have been before the Lord in closet prayer, observe how God hath been dealing with your hearts, that you may be suitably disposed and affected ; if the Lord hath withdrawn himself from you, left you under hardness, deadness, distraction, uncomfortable-ness ; you are to mourn for it, inquire the cause of it, reflect upon yourselves, see what guilt there is upon your conscience, which separates betwixt God and your souls : and then (if time permit) begin again, lament the sin, be ingenuous in confession, make stronger resolutions, remove all obstructions, that God and your souls may not be at any distance, reckon straight, and make up your accounts, part friends that you may meet friends the next time you go to him. If

you find that God hath helped you, melted your hearts, and graciously manifested himself to your souls, take special notice of it, record that for time to come, slight not the least appearances of God in your favour, acknowledge him, and praise him for these manifestations of his love. Learn this lesson even from Hagar the bond woman: when she was in a solitary wilderness, the angel of the Lord comforts her and tells her that God had heard her affliction, that she was with child, and that her seed should be multiplied; she as a grateful return to God for his kindness, sets an asterism of observation upon the place, for a memorial of God's seeing and looking after her, "so the well was called Beer-lahai-roi," that is, the well of him that liveth, and seeth me, Gen. xvi. 13, 14. Thus do you: think and think again, Oh, who, or what am I, that God should look after me, or take notice of me, in this desolate state and place! I shall remember this time of love whilst I live; in such a room I met with God, such a chamber or closet was a Bethel, a mount Nebo, where I beheld my Jesus, and took a blessed view of the promised land.—Thus Christians, reflect upon, and recollect your experiences in God's presence, which may be of use to you all your days.

2. Let your behaviour at all times be suitable to your closet prayers, let it appear that you are wholly devoted to God; cross not your prayers with your practices; pray much, and live well; let it appear that you have been with God, that you have been drawing supplies from the spring-head; walk with men as those that walk with God; let indications and evidence of your heavenly intercourse be perceivable in your gracious expressions and exemplary conversation; live not after the ordinary rate of professors. As your heart is God-wards, so let your light be men-wards,

that they may see your good works and glorify God : carry something out of your closet, that may hold forth the word of life and work of grace ; be able to say in your conduct what David speaks in words, Psal. cxix. 55, 56, after he had said, " He remembered God's name in the night," he adds, " This I had, because I kept thy precepts ;" he tells not what it was, but certainly something it was, worth having—possibly, it was some strength to obey the will of God, some power over a corruption. O Christians, let your actions demonstrate what you get in God's presence. What a sin and shame it is, when persons do that morally which Moses did literally, even come down from the mount and break the tables of God's law, as soon as they are off the place. Oh how sad it is for a person to come down from closet prayer, and be proud, passionate, envious, or covetous ! and observe it, then you are most in danger, for then doth Satan tempt most, and your hearts are then most apt to be secure, conceited, and carnally confident, as though you had done enough, and might now sit down and take your ease ; and having sweat at duty, and suddenly cooling, the gracious soul doth contract a dangerous surfeit, and fall into a languishing condition ; be jealous therefore of yourselves when you have been with God in secret ; and have an eye upon the devil, who is like a swindler, who strikes in with a young heir, when he hath newly received his rents, and never leaves him till he hath eased him of his money. Oh now walk warily and watchfully, consider where you have been, and do nothing contrary to your communion or profession. Let it never be said of you, as some are apt to say, I wonder what such persons do so much alone ! unless they lived better and conducted themselves after another mode ; they pretend devotion, but there is little seen in their

conversation, they will talk as vainly, live as freely, be as hard and false in their way of trading, and be as proud, scornful, perfidious and injurious as others are. Ah Christians, let this never be said, at least give no occasion for such speeches; let the world see that your prayers have some efficacy, that you get some strength in duties which you lay out in your practice.

3. Another duty incumbent upon you after you have been with God in secret, is, to wait for a seasonable return; stand upon your watch, hearken what God will speak; "Unto thee," saith David, "will I direct my prayer, and will look up," Psal. v. 3. So do you, Christians, look up to see what becomes of your prayers, observe what answers God gives. It is mockery of another, Pilate-like, to ask a question and expect no answer: and is it not a gross solecism in religion, to speak many things to God, and expect no return? It is certainly a great fault among Christians, to pray and pray, and never to consider or gather up the fruits of prayer. Is it not a strange piece of folly for men to be always sowing, and never to look for a harvest? Surely Christians have more harvests than they are aware of; therefore, sirs, observe how you reap, take special notice of any thing that looks like a return of prayer; examine it thoroughly, gather something out of it, catch at what comes from the King of heaven, as Benhadad's servants did by the king of Israel's words; and if there be but a hint, lay it up, make much of it, improve it, praise God for it, and hope for more. It is the negligence or unwarrantable modesty of some Christians, to think that they can expect no fruit of their prayers, because of the imperfection of their duties; forgetting God's gracious promise to upright-hearted seekers, and remembering his strict justice to such as seek him not in the due order. But, sirs, you

must so be humbled, as also to believe; you must so deny your own righteousness, as also to improve Christ's intercession; you are to renounce all conceit of merit in yourselves, and yet look up for mercy from God. God hath graciously annexed his promise of acceptance to the performance of the condition; and if God have assisted you to pray right on the whole, you may expect his audience; for God is faithful and merciful, both in forgiving our iniquities, and granting us mercies.* God's answers are larger than our askings; when we truly pray for a piece of bread, God giveth a whole acre of land, as Luther saith;† and he tells us, that when his wife was sick, he prayed to God that she might live: "so," saith he, "he not only granted that request, but also therewith he hath given us a goodly farm at Zorlsdorf, and thereto hath blessed us with a fruitful year." Instances of this sort are endless. There is never a sincere prayer lost; God always gives in return, only we either do not observe or mistake his mercies, and lose the comfort of them. An answer of prayer doth not always come in the way we expect it; we look for it at the front door, and it comes in at the back door, while we are still expecting the friend we look for, he is in the house; the mercy we desired is received, only it comes in a way we thought not of, and are therefore apt to overlook it: therefore take heed of confining God to your way or limiting him to your time.

4. Communicate your success, and thereby commend the duty to others: thus David saith, "Come, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul," Psal. lxxvi. 16. "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him," Psal. xxxiv. 6. Do you as I have done, and you shall speed as I have sped. Do not mistake this, I would

* 1 John i. 9. 2 Tim. iv. 8. † Luth. Colloq. Mens. fol. 245.

not have you tell every one when you go to closet prayer, or when you have been at it—that is a pharisaical blowing of a trumpet; but you must, at some times, to such persons as you can confide in, or as you have some well-grounded hope of profiting, tell them your experience, for their direction and encouragement; in this case acquaint them how God is wont to deal with your hearts, what good you have found from God in that duty, and you question not but upon a conscientious use thereof they may find the like advantage; and this would be singular of use, for hereby they have not only a rule for it, but the exemplifying of it in a precedent, and we know that examples have a prevailing influence; especially, see that you put your family upon this practice. O what a blessed thing were it, if every person in some room of the house were engaged with God in secret prayer! how bravely would that house be perfumed! how well would the trade of godliness thrive! Surely such a house would be a more blessed beautiful edifice than any prince's palace under heaven. It is the disposition of gospel penitents to mourn, every family apart, husbands and wives apart, Zech. xii. 11, 12. and of gracious souls, “to be like doves of the valleys, every one mourning for his iniquity,” Ezek. vii. 16. There must be joint prayers, and separate prayers, together and apart. Let not Christians be content to find Christ in private for themselves, but let them do what they can that others also may enjoy him; this was the frame of the church, Cant. iii. 4. When she had found him, “I held him,” saith she, “and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house,” that is, into more public assemblies. And truly, Christians, that man hath not found Christ at all, that would not have all others to find him. O, thinks the Christian in his

retirement, that others did but feel and enjoy what my soul hath sweet experience of; would to God, my husband, wife, brother, father, child, neighbour, would but try this course a while, O what advantage would they get by it! Though I eat these sweet morsels alone, yet fain would I have others to partake with me. In things of this world, persons are apt to grudge others any great benefit, which they may have obtained; but in spiritual advantages there is no envy, and if there be, it proceeds not from grace, but from corrupt nature: the more grace the less envy; and when envy is gone, persons will be communicative. Take away envy, and mine is thine, and thine is mine.* True grace or “charity is kind, envieth not,” 1 Cor. xiii. 4. Now this is what I am recommending, that they who have found Christ would be so charitable to souls as to communicate the knowledge of him and the way to enjoy him, unto others; thus doth Andrew come to Simon, and Philip to Nathaniel, and both of them were (as a man finding a jewel, and cannot contain,) overjoyed, and cry out *εὕρηκα, εὕρηκα*, I have found him, “we have found the Messiah,” John i. 41—45. And when the poor woman of Samaria, had been privately conversing with Jesus, down she threw, or at least, left behind her, her waterpot, and all in haste, went to the city, and said to the men, “Come see a man which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?” John iv. 28, 29. Thus do you, sirs, promote and propagate the observance of this choice duty, commend it to the practice of others, and so you may be instruments of good.

* Tolle invidiam, mea tua sunt et tua mea.

CHAP. VI.

ON THE MATTER OR WORDS OF PRAYER.

SECTION I.

The Lord's Prayer.

THERE is one thing yet remains, on which it may be expected something should be said, and that is, the matter in praying, or words of prayer; whether it be lawful or requisite to use a form or not? Most judge, that as forms are lawful, so prescribed words may be requisite to some young beginners in religion, and other Christians of weak parts, who cannot express their desires to God in fit words, for the purpose of furnishing them with aid, when conscious of their deficiency or inexperience.* Yet, Christians ought to press after more growth and proficiency, that they may lay aside those crutches, and arrive at the gift of prayer, which may be of singular use. As for closet prayer, Dr. Hammond doth assert it, that every one may ask his own wants in what form of words he shall think fit.† And, indeed, all particular cases incident and variable, can scarce be comprehended in one constant form: besides, in secret prayer, God doth not so much stand upon phrases or well formed sentences, as the workings of the heart in sighs and groans, which are the best rhetoric in his ears. It is inquired, whether we may use the Lord's prayer? I answer, we may use it as other prayers in scripture; but, I conceive, the principal end of it is, not to be rehearsed every time we pray, but to be regarded as an

* Videas Ames. Cas. Cons. lib. 4. c. 17. p. 190.

† Practical Catech. pag. 277.

example, platform, or directory, according to the contents whereof we must direct our prayers.

Therefore for the further help of young professors, I shall briefly touch on the several branches of that admirable, compendious rule of prayer, which you have Matt. vi. 9—13; and the rather, because it may seem to refer chiefly, though not solely, to closet devotion: what I shall say to it may be a practical analyzing of it, in its several parts and branches.

First, The preface, *Our Father which art in heaven*. You may thus make use of it: Infinite and eternal Majesty, the Maker of heaven and earth, who dwellest in the highest heavens, and in the lowest hearts, who seest all things here below, and art a God that hearest prayer; I am a poor worm at thy foot-stool, looking up to the throne of thy grace; cast a fatherly eye upon me, and though I be by nature a child of wrath, yet through Jesus Christ make me thy child by grace and adoption, teach me to cry, Abba, Father, with holy reverence and filial confidence; raise my heart to heaven, beget in me faith in thy promises, love to my brethren, and due apprehensions of thy sovereign power, and gracious condescension; that praying by the help of thy Spirit, in the name of thy Son, I may obtain good at thy fatherly hands.—Secondly, The petitions.

1. *Hallowed be thy Name*: O my God, I have dishonoured thee all my days by my ignorance, pride, hardness, and unthankfulness, and I am unapt and unable to glorify thee, but do thou glorify thyself in my conversion and salvation; help me to know and adore thee, to make a high account of thy titles, attributes, and ordinances; to believe thy word and admire thy works, in mercy or judgment; help me with spiritual thoughts becoming my holy profession, with pious lips speaking good of thy name, and a suitable conversation

to walk before the Lord. Holy God, destroy atheism, ignorance, idolatry, and profaneness; magnify thy name through the world, and direct and dispose all things to the advancement of thy glory, by thy over-ruling providence, and thy infinite wisdom.

2. *Thy kingdom come*: Lord, I must confess, that by nature I am dead in sin, and a bond-slave to the prince of darkness, who rules in my heart, and leads me captive by ignorance, error, and disobedience; but do thou, by the power of thy grace, cast out the strong man, and take possession of my heart; sway thy blessed sceptre in me, and bring my whole man to obedience. Destroy Satan's kingdom, propagate the gospel among all nations, purge thy house, furnish thy church with officers, orders, and pure ordinances; make kings nursing fathers to it, convert sinners, confirm saints, comfort the sad, and hasten thy second coming to judgment, and the blessed kingdom of glory.

3. *Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven*. Holy Majesty, I acknowledge my natural ignorance of thy will, and inability to obey it, yea, enmity and antipathy against it; my best services are imperfect, my spirit repining under thy hand, and my will perversely resisting grace, and rushing into sin; but, dear Lord, inform my mind, conquer my will, order my affections sweetly to comply with thy mind; teach me to do thy will in obedience; make me content with thy will concerning me in every providence; beget in me those heavenly dispositions that are in the glorious angels, and glorified saints, that with humility, cheerfulness, diligence, and faithfulness, zeal, sincerity and constancy, I may be actively and passively at thy disposal.

4. *Give us this day our daily bread*: Heavenly Father, I must confess, that by the original apostacy of man, I have lost my right to every morsel of bread,

and deserve not to breathe in thy air, or tread on thy earth! my sin hath put a curse and sting into every comfort, I can obtain nothing by my industry, yet am prone to desire, get, and use thy mercies unlawfully; thy blessing only is the staff of my bread; help me to wait on thy providence in a moderate use of lawful means; give me a competency of outward comforts, thy blessing in the use thereof, and contentment therewith; and, above all, a right thereto in Christ, and prevent needless cares and sensual delights.

5. *Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors:* Lord, I am wofully guilty of original and actual sin, and am thereby a debtor to divine justice; I owe millions, and cannot pay a single farthing, therefore deserve to be cast into the dark dungeon of eternal torments; but, dear Lord, thou hast found a ransom, who stands in man's stead to be surety for him. O accept me in thy beloved Son Jesus Christ; wash away my sins in his blood; clothe my naked soul with his glorious robes; give me saving faith, to embrace him upon his own terms; free my soul from the guilt and punishment of sin; pardon my daily failings, and seal an acquittance in my conscience, which tells me I do freely forgive all offences against myself.

6. *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:* Lord, it were righteous with thee to leave me to be assaulted and conquered by Satan, my soul's cruel enemy. My heart is growing sensual, proud, and careless; apt to thrust myself into temptations, but unable to resist or overcome them: thou mayest justly bring me into occasions and leave me to myself therein; but, O my God, keep my soul from being tempted, or assist me in the hour of temptation, or recover me out of my foils and falls; sanctify my slips, make my standing surer in thy strength, tread Satan under my feet, con-

quer the world for me, crucify me unto the world, subdue my flesh within, and in due time raise my soul above all sins and snares, into thine immediate presence.

And then shut up all with such like words as these, on that conclusion; *For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever. Amen.* O my God, I am unworthy thou shouldst grant my petitions for any thing in myself; all my arguments in prayer, and grounds of acceptance, I fetch from thyself. Thou hast a kingdom of grace, and throne of grace, from whence thou hearest prayers, and dispenseth blessings: all the power is in thine hands, to give and to forgive, to kill or make alive, and the glory shall be thine if thou hear my prayer; and blessed be my God for all my mercies. I ascribe to thee, and thee alone, eternal sovereignty, omnipotence, and glorious excellency, which, as I desire all may be given to God, so I am humbly emboldened by faith, to rest upon thy power and promise, that in due time thou wilt hear my requests; and, as a token of that my desire and confidence, my soul doth echo forth, Amen, even so be it.

Thus I have given you a specimen from the Lord's prayer, of directions for the matter of our prayers. I shall but propound another scripture instance, relative to arguments in prayer.

SECTION II.

Jacob, an example of powerful pleading with God.

GOD would have his people converse with him in a rational way, and God's children have employed many pleas in prayer, which they have produced in strong expostulations, as we may find scattered up and down in scripture, as Moses, Nehemiah, Ezra, and Daniel, in their approaches to God; and above all, David through

the book of Psalms, is exceeding full this way. But I shall pass by the rest, and fix only upon one scripture instance, and the rather because it was a secret or solitary prayer, of which we are now speaking, and there are notable pleas therein, which may possibly suit our condition, therefore I shall briefly examine the parts of it, and recommend it to your imitation. It is that of good Jacob, who was trained up in this holy art of wrestling with God;—Gen. xxxii. 9—12. His pleas there may be reduced to these ten particulars.

1. He makes use of suitable titles of God; he calls him “Lord,” or Jehovah, which denotes God’s self-existence, and his giving being or existence to the promises, in first making them, and then making them good. Thus do you, sirs, raise in your hearts suitable apprehensions of God, and let your expressions be answerable; acknowledge God as the infinite, omniscient, omnipotent Majesty, able to do beyond what you can ask or think, and that you neither need nor desire any more than what his almighty power can effect; tell him, if all-sufficiency cannot supply you, you are content to go unsped; but you question neither his hand nor heart; you are sure he both can and will help his children in their need; he will make good with his hand, what he hath spoken with his mouth, for he is Jehovah.

2. He pleads covenant relation to God. “O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac,” and so my God! this is an admirable plea. If God own a soul in a covenant relation, he will certainly do it good; though his grace be free, yet when God hath chosen any to be his, he hath as it were engaged himself to own them; now he hath pledged his truth. Thus then a believer may plead—Lord thou hast been my father’s God, and wilt thou not be my God? and wilt thou be my God, and withhold such a mercy from

me? my ancestors found grace in thy sight, and obtained those same good things I am craving; and am not I under the very same covenant with them? are not the promises the same? is there not the same mediator? Lord, I come to thee in a covenant relation for a covenant mercy, and wilt thou deny me?

3. He pleads a warrant for his undertaking, appealing to God that he was in the way he had directed him to go, saying, "Thou, Lord, which saidst unto me, return unto thy country." Oh with what encouragement may the soul plead for assistance and protection, that is in God's way and work, according to his own appointment? thus then plead—Lord, hast not thou set me about this work? hast thou not given me a charge to do what I do? have I not a plain positive scripture warrant to bind my conscience? I dare not do otherwise. I may say, if I be deceived, thou hast deceived me, but I am sure, plain scripture is no deceiver, I cannot otherwise understand such a command. And O my God, since thou hast thus engaged me in thy work, wilt thou suffer me to miscarry therein?

4. He pleads a particular promise, "I will deal well with thee;" surely a comprehensive word, containing in it all that Jacob wanted. Thus must a Christian search the scriptures, get hold of a promise, spread it before the Lord, whether for spiritual grace, inward comfort, or outward supply, in this way:—Lord, I find a promise in such a place, to a person in my circumstances, well adapted and pertinent to my very condition, as if it had been calculated purposely for me in this juncture; now, Lord, make it good to my soul and seed; thou hast made it good to others in my state, and why not to me? am not I an heir of promise, and must not I have a share therein?

5. Jacob humbles himself under a sense of his own unworthiness, "I am not worthy," saith he, "of the least of all thy mercies." This is the property and excellency of a saint, to annihilate himself, and make God all in all; so Abraham when pleading for Sodom, calls himself dust and ashes, and the centurion judged himself not worthy that Christ should come under his roof. Thus then, abase thyself:—Lord, I am not worthy to enjoy any common mercy, not fit to lift up mine eyes to thee, being less than the least of thy mercies; behold I am vile, I am not only destitute of merits, but full of demerits; hell is my desert, I can challenge nothing as mine but sin, and the fruits thereof; Lord, I condemn myself, do not thou condemn me, nor cast me from thee.

6. He is affected with God's faithfulness in the performance of his promises; acknowledging the truth of God shewed to his servant. There is mercy in God's making a promise to Abraham, truth in making it good to Jacob.* Well then, with Jacob, thus plead:—Lord, it is true, there was nothing of desert in me to engage thee, either to make or keep thy gracious promise, but sure, the word is gone from thee, yea, and notwithstanding all my treachery and unfaithfulness thou hast kept it to this day, O keep it still, it depends wholly on thee, let not my vanity alter the course of thy mercy, but pardon and accept, as thou hast done from the time of my deliverance from spiritual Egypt until now.

7. Jacob further recounts his former poverty, his low condition—"With my staff I passed over this Jordan," I came hither in poor destitute circumstances, a sorry pilgrim. Thus do you plead—truth it is, Lord, thy grace is absolutely free, there was neither wit nor

* Mic. vii. 20.

wealth to move thee to do what thou hast done. I can remember the time, when I was a depraved and guilty creature, in a forlorn state. There was no capacity in me to do thee any remarkable service, thou didst not set thy love upon me for any natural or moral accomplishment, but even so, Father, because it pleased thee; and wilt thou now forsake me? thou mightest have done that at an easier rate.

8. Here is Jacob's stone of memorial for past and present mercies—"Now," saith he, "I am become two bands;" that is, two great companies of wives, children, servants, flocks, and herds. I may say, These, where had they been? It is strange to see poor worm Jacob thus rich. O the bounty of God! So do thou say—Lord, consider what thou hast done for me; must all this be in vain? wilt thou throw away these good things? wilt thou not rather crown these gifts with a continuance of thy kindness? wilt thou return to do me hurt, after thou hast done me all this good? dost thou not remember my convictions and consolations—my fears, tears, doubtings, and refreshments? O the passages of love betwixt thee and me! Shall I be the grave of these mercies? Lord, forget me not!

9. Here is his sense of approaching danger—"Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother—for I fear him," &c. A brother offended, is harder to be won than a strong city. Jacob's danger was a spur to his prayer. A pursued hart runs fast for shelter: so do thou, soul, when afraid; fly to the Lord, and say, O my God, I have deadly enemies within and without; my case is forlorn and desperate; I have none to run to but thyself: hast not thou said, that "in thee the fatherless find mercy?" Other refuge fails me, no man cares for my soul: Lord relieve, deliver this sinful wretch, else I go down into the pit.

10. Once more, doth Jacob plead the promise, and enlarge on the granted charter—"Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea?" Thus do you; still seek out, derive sweetness from, and put in suit the promises by earnest prayer, in this manner:—Lord, hast thou not promised a heart of flesh, a broken heart? Why then is my heart hardened from thy fear? Dost thou not say, thou wilt "give thy Holy Spirit to them that ask it?" This, Lord, I want, to be a spirit of truth and illumination, a spirit of prayer and supplication, a spirit of grace and sanctification, and of satisfaction. O bestow this mercy upon me! Dost thou not promise to take away my iniquities, by pardoning grace, for thine own name's sake, and to subdue my corruptions, and increase grace and bring me to glory? Lord, remember thy word unto thy servant, in which thou hast caused me to trust.

CHAP. VII.

FORMING A CONCLUSION TO THE SUBJECT OF CLOSET PRAYER.

SECTION I.

The Exhortation of the Text enforced.

MY beloved friends, I beseech you suffer the word of exhortation. You see the work before you, you see a plain scripture warrant for it, you have heard many instances of scripture patterns, you see the manner of the performance; let none now plead ignorance, or

look upon it as needless, or make excuses, or evasions. Is it not equal and reasonable? Is it not worth the while to converse with your God in private? Look over the reasons of the doctrine, and see if there be not some weight in them.

But, besides those, I shall propose to you these expostulatory motives.

1. Would you not be such as make conscience of every commanded duty? You are no real saints unless you have respect to all God's commandments, Psal. cxix. 6. If you pick and choose in your obedience, you are hollow-hearted hypocrites. And can you deny this to be a duty? And will you stand parleying with God? Must he erase this sentence out of the Bible, to humour your conceits and sloth? Is not closet prayer a christian duty? Dare you argue against it? Out of what topics will you fetch your arguments? And do you acknowledge it to be a duty, and will you not practise it? Your own mouths will condemn you: what need any more witnesses? But if you be real Christians, I dare say, you do approve of it, and practise it sometimes; and why are you not constant in your obedience? Is it not the characteristic of a saint to do righteousness at all times? Psal. cvi. 3. O consider this, and do not either neglect a command, or omit this known duty.

2. Would you not have the truth of grace cleared up in your souls? Surely there is no Christian but would arrive at assurance; and this is one way to evidence sincerity, being much with God in secret duty. As he grieves truly that grieves without witness;* so those religious actings are most evidential of grace that are least obvious to the view of men, and whereby a Christian approves his heart only to the heart-search-

* Ille dolet verè qui sine teste dolet.

ing God. Here is the true Israelite, that can, with Jacob, converse with God alone, and seeks the praise, not of men but of God.* Observe it, a Christian ordinarily hath not that comfort in a duty exposed to others' view, which he hath in what he performs betwixt God and his own soul; for there is most danger of selfishness in the former, and more self-denial in the latter. The wind of applause may blow men far in a creditable performance, but humility and sincerity are most evident in secret appeals to God. Consider this, Christians; you run to sermons, ministers, and good books, and take much pains to try your state by marks and signs; make trial of this more compendious course, to clear your state—be much with God in closet prayer.

3. Would you not be found in the possession of the power of godliness? O then engage much in closet prayer. Alas, sirs, hearing sermons, reading scriptures, discoursing religiously, praying in the family, may be done only for fashion's sake, and the person that doth them, may have no more than the form of godliness. Mistake me not, I do not condemn the practice of these things, nor them that do them, as formalists for that: God forbid; they are scripture duties: still the outward part of these may be done without the power of godliness; but to struggle with a man's own heart, to wrestle with God in secret, to meditate and give up a man's self to these duties, as in the presence of God; O, this shews something of the power of grace, and life of holiness. This is heart work, and that is hard work; these are costly duties, spiritual exercises, which are more acceptable than to offer God thousands of rams, or a first-born son. David would not offer that to God which cost him nothing, and shall we be content with

* Rom. ii. 23.

the ordinary duties which may be consistent with an easy plodding formality?

4. Would you not have your hearts relieved under pressing burdens? are you in love with your sorrows? would you not be rid of them? Behold, I show unto you an excellent way to get relief, which is a recourse to God in secret prayer. I have heard some esteemed Christians say, that when any thing hath lain upon their hearts, ready to overwhelm them, they have run to God in private, and there have left their load, and thence have gone away with good Hannah, and have been no more sad: and experience tells us, that when any pressing affliction lies upon us, if we can unbosom ourselves to an intimate friend, though not a word of counsel or comfort pass from him, yet, that opening of our hearts doth ease, as vomiting doth an oppressed stomach. And hence, saith Elihu, "I will speak that I may be refreshed." And scripture confirms this, Phil. iv. 6, "Be careful for nothing, but in every thing make your requests known to God;" pour your cares and fears into the bosom of God. But how? Why, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving: lay your load on God by prayer, and he will bear it.

5. Would you not obtain boldness in access to God, and familiarity with him? O, go often to God in closet prayer. Princes assume a greater degree of stateliness when conversing with their favourites before others, but when none are present, they open their hearts more familiarly to them: I know Abraham, saith God, he and I are intimately acquainted; he is my friend, he visits me often, and "shall I hide any thing from Abraham?" I will take him aside, and tell him my whole heart: so will God to you; he will communicate much to you, and you may say any thing to him; you are not strangers to him, but may come into his presence boldly, and he

will make you welcome.—Heb. iv. 16. On the contrary, what a dreadful thing will it be to have estranged thoughts of God, in duty, or at death? Strangeness betwixt God and a soul is a sad and uncomfortable thing. Wicked men are total strangers to God: gracious souls, little employed in secret prayer, are little acquainted with God, and worship afar off; but sincere souls, conversing much with God in secret, attain to abundance of intimacy with the Lord; and is not that a mercy worth a world?

6. Would you have the sins of others not to bring wrath and judgment on the place? O, then, let your souls weep and pray in secret places, as Jeremiah did, chap. xiii. 17. This is the last and safest way to be delivered from the guilt of open crying sins in the land; even to mourn for them in prayer, before the Lord. Thus did Lot and David, Paul, and all saints: yea, Moses' solitary prayer interposed betwixt flaming wrath and offending Israel; thus did he stand in the gap, and believers may still perform a similar office. A gift in secret may pacify that wrath that is already broken out against us. Wicked men sin in secret,* let us mourn in secret; yea, they sin openly, let us lament privately. The truth is, secret sins may undo a nation, except the cry of the saints' secret prayers be louder than the cry of wicked men's secret sins. O then, begin and proceed in devotional exercises. "Arise, cry out in the night, in the beginning of the watches pour out thine heart like water, before the face of the Lord."—Lam. ii. 19.

7. Would you have your own secret sins not set in the light of God's countenance? † then repent and pray alone, humble your souls in private, for your secret sins. Are you not conscious to yourselves of

* 2 Kings xvii. 9.

† Psalm xc. 8.

much secret guilt? and doth not God expect that you should set yourselves to mourn over it, and cry to him for pardoning grace in secret? do you not know that God will bring every secret thing to light in the great day of accounts?* Nay, God may punish you openly, as he did David for his secret sin.† Well then, anticipate that sad severe judgment, by judging yourselves, and deprecating his righteous judgment. I may say to you individually, as Solomon to Shimei, thou knowest all the wickedness which thy heart is privy to; and where are thy prayers, and tears, and groanings in secret? O, sirs, if others' sins draw you not to secret prayer, let your own, which may afford matter of abundant grief in your closets and retirement.

8. Would you not prevent and circumvent wicked men's secret plots? be sure then, you undermine them by secret prayer: the devil and the pope have many close and conclave consultations to undermine the Protestant religion, and to root out the name of Israel from under heaven; they are working under ground to do us mischief; we have seen by the light of London's flames their hellish devices in their dark vaults; "Wicked men lie in wait secretly, as a lion in his den, to catch the poor and murder the innocent,"‡ Psal. x. 8, 9: and now what course is to be taken for preventing these horrid designs? alas, we have no other remedy, than the ancient Christians' weapons, prayers and tears; these may break their nets, and blunt their weapons: good Jeremiah knew not that they had devised devices against him, but he reveals his cause to God in prayer, and then God shews him their doings, and prevents their attempts, Jer. xi. 18—20. Saints' closet prayer, may break wicked men's closet plots. Fall close then to this great duty.

* Eccl. xii. 14. † 2 Sam. xii. 12. ‡ Psal. lxiv. 1—5.

9. Would you avoid being condemned by the heathen's chamber idolatry? O then, do you perform chamber and closet duties! They had their *Divos penetrales*, or *penates*, their household gods, and closet images, they had their *opertanea* and *tenebrosa sacra*, their covered, veiled, and mysterious exercises in secret places. And the Jews borrowed several mystical rites of the heathens; hence we read Ezek. viii. 12, of chambers of imagery, as the Papists at this day have their crucifixes, their petty, chamber, closet deities, where they drop their beads, and do homage to their idols; and shall these in their blind superstition condemn our irreligion? shall it be said of a devout philosopher, that in so many years he spoke more with the gods than with men? and shall it be said of any of us, that God (even the true God) is not in all our thoughts? or so little in our lips, at least, in secret solemn addresses to him? let not poor ignorant Papists out-strip us in devotion, since there is such vast difference.

10. Would you not be reconciled to God's dispensations? When the Lord our God puts us to silence, and into solitary places, he expects that we should visit him there: Cant ii. 14, "O my dove that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs," that is, in an afflicted, persecuted, and desolate condition, "let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice." that is, in the duties of prayer, praise, and gospel ordinances, "for then was her voice sweet, and countenance comely." When we are cast out, then doth God receive and entertain us; and this advantage have God's children had by privacy, into which they were cast, as we heard before of Jeremiah, chap. xv. 15—17. So an individual is described, Lam. iii. 28, 29, when he sitteth alone in solitariness, then he put-

teth his mouth in the dust, with fasting and prayer; if so be there may be hope. While persons have their full occupation or enjoyment, they are too busy; but when any are thus occupied, they should occasionally withdraw themselves and retreat to God. The less comfort persons find in public ordinances, the more serious must they be in closet performances, that the loss may be supplied in another way.

SECTION II.

Several Objections Considered and Answered.

IT is strange if our carnal hearts and cavilling spirits have not something to say against this difficult duty; I shall therefore mention what objections, I can foresee may be made, and briefly answer them.

1. *Obj.* We pray in our families, and is not that enough? what needs all this ado?

Answ. This objection cannot be made by all, some have no families to pray with, but if thou dost pray in thy family, it is well. There are many graceless individuals and prayerless houses, of which it may be said, the fear of God is not in this place; O the wrath that shall be poured out on such families. But suppose thou dost, family prayer is one thing, and closet prayer is another; and let me tell thee, God never made one duty to supersede another; you must not jostle out one work, because you are bound to perform another. Every thing is beautiful in its place and season. God's commandments are exceeding broad, and take in a great compass of duties. You must worship God in your houses; that exempts you not from worshipping God in your closets, no more than in the public assemblies: there are equal commands for all, necessity for all, you neglect at your peril;

besides, I told you, a child of God hath a secret errand to his Father, of which it is not fit his family should know: and on this account God hath appointed closet prayer, as being tender over the credit of his people, that they might not discover their spiritual nakedness to any but to that God who knows thier secrets, and will keep their counsel. And I must tell thee, soul, thou art very little sensible of thy spiritual state or wants, if thou hast nothing to say to God that thou wouldst not have others to hear.

2. *Obj.* But I am a poor man, and busy in my calling, and cannot spend so much time in closet prayer; I have other occasions.

Ans. Friend, hast thou any greater business than the affairs of thy soul? let thy calling stand still rather than thy soul should be lost. Cursed be those occasions that eat out religion. But consider, you may follow both callings, if you be observant; our general and particular callings must not interfere. Clean creatures divided the hoof, considerate Christians are such as rightly proportion works to their particular seasons. A chief part of David's arithmetic of numbering days, was in that which we call division, to cast up the account of this our short life, so as to divide the little total sum thereof, into the several portions of time due for performing every duty in. The handmaid may not thrust out the mistress; nor the shop have all, and the chamber none of our time. You are flat atheists, if you think praying will hinder your work; no, no, it blesseth and expediteth temporal affairs.* We use to say, meat and matins hinder no work. Canst thou not get time for eating and sleeping? yea, dost thou not spend as much time in idleness, and vain discourse, as would be required every day for this duty? if thou

* Nobis pietate peculia crescunt.—*Mant.*

hadst an honest heart, thou wouldst redeem time from thy meat, or sleep, or recreations, for prayer, rather than neglect a duty, or ruin thy soul: the truth is, we complain we want time, but we waste time. There is not the poorest labourer, but he mispends more time than prayer time comes to: and why should any water be let off, when there is little enough in the channel to turn the mill for, or towards, our God?

3. *Obj.* But I am a servant, and must obey my master; I am kept too hard at work, to get time for secret prayer; I am called to work betimes, dogged to it all the day.

Answ. Though you be servants to do men's work, yet you are not slaves to their lusts; in that respect you must not be the servants of men; if you be servants, you are the Lord's free men; if free, you are Christ's servants, 1 Cor. vii. 22, 23. Remember, you have a master in heaven; no mortal creature can discharge you from your attendance on God. You must do God's work as well as your master's, and your master's work for God's sake.* Oh sirs, do not neglect your duty to God, to please men. Can your superior answer for your neglect, or interpose betwixt flaming wrath and your sinning souls? but I am afraid, some lay the blame on masters, when the fault is in themselves. Deceive not thyself by accusing others to clear thyself; this was Adam's fault. Think not that another's rigour can excuse thy neglect. Let me tell you, there is never a servant so strictly watched, but might steal some time from his master for his God, and yet do him no wrong; only see that you be prudent in choosing such seasons, as may not provoke your master, or prejudice his occasions. And be often in your callings lifting up your hearts to God; be content with your

* Eph. vi. 6, 7.

condition : had you more liberty, it may be your hearts would not be in so good a frame. But let me bespeak masters' indulgence to poor and pious servants; Ohinder them not in any good work, rather put them upon it, encourage them in it, bless God that you have praying servants; this is a hopeful presage of good success. Let not your servants fare the worse, but better, for being God's servants.

4. *Obj.* But I have no closet to pray in, no convenient room for secret prayer: I have a little house, a busy full family, and cannot withdraw myself.

Answ. A good heart will find room, either within doors, or without; a gracious person will seek out places to pray in; any sorry cote where he can enjoy his God, will be a Bethel; or, if he cannot get to this exercise under a roof, he will, with good Isaac, walk out into the fields to meditate and to pray. Could heathens and idolatrous Jews plant groves for their superstition, in an apish imitation of Abraham's practice? and cannot a bird of paradise take its flight out of some wood or arbour into heaven? But, most need not make this silly slight excuse; they have good roofs to be under, and need not worship God *sub Dio*, in the open air. There are few of us that have not convenient rooms, but most of us want affectionate hearts to visit God therein. Now, Christians, make good use of your houses to serve God therein, else they may justly vomit you out, and leave you harbourless; and then, what dreadful guilt and terror will follow you whithersoever you go? O consider London's flames and ruins; your houses are no better built, nor more secured from the like catastrophe; do not weaken their foundations by wilful neglects, or scandalous sins.

5. *Obj.* But I know some good Christians who

never use it, yea, who maintain that in their judgments it is not necessary, except in some extraordinary cases; what say you to that?

Answ. I never yet met with such persons as had the face of religion, that ever spoke against the ordinary practice of this duty of closet prayer. I confess, I have met with some, who being urged to family prayer, have put it off with this evasion, that they would pray in their closets; how well, the God of heaven knows. But if the judgment of any professors, be so far bribed as to plead for the flesh on this neglect, the Lord rebuke them, and forgive them, they know not what they say. This is a lamentation, that there is scarce any truth so sacred, or duty so spiritual, but it hath been contradicted in these licentious days; some have pleaded against family prayer, catechising, christian meetings, and what not? but they can produce no solid arguments; do not you follow their example contrary to plain scripture precepts and precedents. Many were produced for confirmation, most whereof were not only in extraordinary cases, but were an ordinary practice. And can you find the day that affords not some special matter to occasion you to make addresses to God in secret prayer? If you be sensible and observant, surely you will see great need for such retirement in ordinary practice. Remember this, that you follow no man, but as he follows Christ: and I am sure our precious Saviour used this practice.

6. *Obj.* But I find not my heart affected or prepared. Is it not a tempting of God, to go when the spirit doth not move me?

Answ. It is a dangerous mistake to think you may not go to duty but when the spirit moves you; for it may be long before it stir; the Spirit is like the wind, which bloweth where and when it listeth: you are

therefore to lay yourselves in the way of the Spirit, and call in his aid, which may be expected in the path of duty. Holy performances are, as it were, the walk of the Spirit, the air where he breathes; and be sure he is most likely to be found in his own track; but you cannot expect him in the neglect of plain duty. Try this way, put God to it, plead his promise; you cannot think to be warm, if you run from the fire. If you have not a disposition to pray, you must pray for a disposition; for neglect, or omission of a duty, never fits, but always unfits for duty. If you will heed your trifling spirits, and accept every excuse which they make, you will never pray. If you play the truant one time, you will have less mind to go to God the next time; guilt makes you afraid, and you dare not come near that God whom you have wronged; as Adam run from God, and Peter would thrust Christ from him, when conscious of guilt. How dare you look God in the face, whom you have slighted? Besides, you will find that neglect of duty, doth not make the next performance more easy, but more difficult. It will (as one saith) require more time and pains for you to tune your instrument, than for another to play his lesson. And is it not more likely God should come to you in pains-taking, than total omission? Do you not read in the Psalms, how often David begun faintly, and ended triumphantly? Try the Lord, and see if he be not better than you expect.

7. *Obj.* But, saith a poor soul, I meet with temptations when I go to God in secret; Satan assaults me, I am timorous, and dare not be alone, or in the dark, but am affrighted.

Answ. It is a sign the duty is good, because so bad a spirit opposeth it. The more Satan sees a duty is for the soul's advantage, the more diligent he is to hin-

der the performance. But must Satan be gratified rather than God glorified, or thy soul edified? Wilt thou give way to him? "Resist the devil, and he will flee from thee." Think not thou canst perform a flesh-displeasing duty when Satan is quiet, and doth not molest; he will be busy to tempt when thou art going to thy God, this is no new thing; he will jog thy hand when thou art writing thy letter to thy friend in heaven. Think not to be more exempted than even thy Saviour himself; he was set upon by the devil in his solitary recesses in the wilderness; and, oh, the horrible nature of those temptations! Matt. iv. When Joshua the high priest prayed, Satan stood at his right hand to resist him; but the issue was good, God rebuked him, Zech. iii. 1, 2. And thus he will do for thee; he will tread Satan under thy feet, and make thee a conqueror; only when thou art annoyed with this foul spirit, turn to God, leave not thy work, let not Satan take thee off duty, then he would attain his end; fall more closely to the work; consider, fasting and prayer cast out the devil, watching and prayer are preservatives from temptation; yea, prayer itself is a chief piece of a Christian's armour.* If you be beat off this, you are routed; this engageth God for you; without this, you are but like other men, and the Philistine will put out your eyes, lead you captive, and make sport of you: stick close to this, whatever you do. Though all the devils in hell roar upon you, yet run to your God in prayer. They are sluggards, or cowards, that say, "There is a lion in the way," when they are called out to hard service or difficult duty; nay, rather say as was once said in an arduous undertaking, "Here is a work fit for the spirit of an Alexander:" so here is a duty that becomes a Christian to manage. By your God you may run

* Matt. xxvi. 41. Eph. vi. 18.

through a troop, and leap over a wall. But more of this anon.

8. *Obj.* But I get no good by closet prayer. I have used it long, and still my heart is as cold, hard, and dead as ever: I will give over now.

Ans. Is not this too like the language of those that say, "It is in vain to serve God?" Mal. iii. 14. And are you like those Atheists that think prayer is to no purpose? I hope not. You think it doeth good to some, but not to you. Well, what is the reason? Is it not because you do not pray aright? Therefore search yourselves, see how you prayed, mourn over your defects, and mend the matter. It is true, one who sees the well dry, breaks or throws away his pitcher. But, is God a barren wilderness? Is it not good for you to draw near to God? were they ever ashamed that waited on him? Hast not thou sometimes found benefit by secret prayer? God is good to the soul that seeks him: try again, you will not lose your labour; "be not weary of well-doing, in due time you shall reap, if you faint not." Let not your hands hang down, let not your knees grow feeble. The text tells you, "Your Father that sees in secret, will reward you openly;" and dare you not trust him beyond sense and experience? There may be more advantage from this duty than you are aware of; you shall not yet know the profit you have by secret prayer; you must keep on in a patient continuance in well-doing, and not give over till you receive a full reward. But, oh, take heed of giving over prayer because you think you want present profit: you cannot do Satan greater service, or your souls more prejudice.

9, *Obj.* But I am weak in parts, and know not what to say; fain I would, but alas, I cannot open my wants to God in prayer, I want gifts, abilities.

Answ. I am glad to hear thee thus complain; thou art fitter for praying, when thou canst lie under the sense of thy inability to pray, that is a useful disposition in duty. But thou sayest thou canst not pray, then I will tell thee what to do; go thy ways alone, and fall down upon thy knees, and plainly tell the Lord thou canst not pray, and entreat him to help thee by his blessed Spirit, which he hath promised to them that ask it; tell the Lord, that thou canst not think a good thought, or speak a good word, without that blessed Spirit, but he will help thine infirmities, and teach thee what to say. O beg hard for that Holy Spirit; and then, let some means be used to get matter of prayer; you know it consists of confession of sin, petition for good things, deprecation of evil, and thanksgiving for mercies: well then, sit down, and think with thyself, what sins thou art guilty of, original or actual, of omission or commission; this is too, too fruitful a subject; take them home, tell God of them, by ingenuous confession; then bethink thyself, what thou wantest at the hands of God, as pardon, grace, peace, heaven, and beg these; consider also what thou art afraid of, as guilt, strength of temptation, effects of sin, God's wrath, Satan's malice; and desire the Lord to prevent and remove these, for Christ's sake; and lastly, recollect what mercies thou hast had from God, and reckon them up to him, with expressions of thankfulness; do this with plainness and seriousness; heed not so much for exact method, or fine phrases; the gilt of the key makes it not open the door a jot the better; and a prayer has no more influence upon God, because of the neat language therein; but unbosom thyself plainly and seriously before thy God, and thou shalt find present assistance and acceptance, and future enlargements and

encouragement. Be honest, though never so homely in prayer.

10. *Obj.* But I like not this stir, it is a hard and difficult work; I would rather do any thing than this, my spirit is wonderful averse to it; say what you will, it will not go down with me, to make all this ado on closet prayer; it is pretty fair if I can keep up such duties as church and family require.

Ans. This is the pleading of flesh and blood, this is the bottom of the former objections, I expected this all along; if the tongue speak not thus, the heart doth. Let a duty be pressed home never so much, a carnal heart will make evasions; though the mouth be stopped, yet a cavilling heart will have something to say against a spiritual duty; and if it cannot be mad with reason, it grows mad without reason, and against scripture. It is easier to bring arguments to convince the judgment, than to draw the will and affections to a thorough obedience. But, O man, wilt thou plead for Baal? wilt thou take the devil's part, and yield to carnal reason? or wilt thou baulk any divine commands to gratify a lazy humour, or a base lust? God forbid; methinks, if thou canst not obey as thou oughtest, yet thou shouldest take God's part, and plead for obedience; Paul doth so, Rom. vii. 15, 16, though he saith, "What I would, that do I not, but what I hate, that do I,"—yet saith he, "I consent to the law that it is good," that is, I take part with God, and join with God's will against my corrupt and carnal affections, which would draw my neck from under this heavenly yoke. And if you have not something within you that takes part with God's revealed will, you are not of God. But a principle of grace doth facilitate and make easy the hardest duties, because there is a likeness betwixt holy hearts and holy performances.

Love makes every thing easy; hence it comes to pass that Christ's yoke is easy, Matt. xi. 30, his ways pleasant, and his commandments not grievous, 1 John v. 3. If thy heart were right, duties would be sweet to thy soul; it is no burden to eat, drink, sleep; the acts of nature are delightful to persons in a right temper, if they be not, nature is oppress'd, and out of order. A child of God in duty, so far as regenerated, is like a man in his calling, or a creature in its proper element; besides, wert thou more accustomed to duty in secret, it would be more familiar to thee, and less irksome. We see by experience, use makes heavy things light, we hardly feel the weight of our clothes, because fitted to us, and constantly carried by us, whereas the same weight upon our shoulders would trouble us. Christians, consider all christian duties are not of equal difficulty; yet withal observe it, duties that are hardest to go through, many times bring the sweetest income; and so is this, the profit of it will abundantly recompense for your pains in it; be sure when a duty is lined with difficulty, and your corrupt hearts draw back, and have most averseness to it, there is something of God in that duty, and God intends you more than ordinary advantage by it; therefore do not say a word against it, but stir up yourselves, spur on your hearts, shake off sloth, and run to God, whatever Satan, the world, or the flesh say to the contrary.

SECTION III.

Some Cases of Conscience, examined and solved.

THERE are yet four cases of conscience I shall briefly propose and answer.

1. *Case.* Whether or not may a hypocrite or graceless soul perform this duty of closet prayer; and what

difference is there betwixt a real saint and an unregenerate person in this exercise?

Ans. It is possible a carnal man may pray in secret, but with these differences:—(1.) He is urged to it by the challenges of an accusing conscience, he is as it were dogged to it, he dare not but do it; but a child of God hath a gracious principle, inclining him to it, from love to God, and a desire to please and enjoy him: yet, through the remainders of corruption, there is much unwillingness in the best, so that sometimes a saint must even force himself to the performance.

(2.) A hypocrite will not thus pray always, Job xxvii. 9, 10; it is only in some pang, or under some pressing affliction; and when this favourable mood is over, he takes his leave of God, till whipt to him again in a similar way; but a child of God is in some measure constant and diligent in the duty, though he may have sinful omissions and intermissions, yet never a total cessation from duty. Grace works the heart God-ward, and the soul is not content without Him.

(3.) A hypocrite doth not make conscience of getting his heart up to God in the duty, he is content with the work done or words said; but a real saint hath most ado with his heart, that is the hardest piece of the work; he dare not leave that behind him, and he hath difficulty in getting it along, and engaging it in the service.

(4.) A carnal man keeps his round in formal duty, but gets nothing; he prays to little profit or purpose, and indeed doth not much study to gain spiritual good: but a child of God is a great gainer, he obtains sometimes communion with God and communications

from him; O what good doth his soul meet with! though not always, yet at times.

2. *Case.* Whether a Christian may bind himself to the performance of this duty of closet prayer at stated times? or suppose a Christian miss his times designed for that duty, what must he then do?

Ans. In general thou mayest and must swear and vow, that thou wilt keep God's commandments, Psal. cxix. 106, so doth David. And in scripture we are bid to make vows, and pay them to the Lord, Psal. lxxvi. 11. Vowing ourselves and all that we have to God, is necessary. Sequestering some part of our time to his service is requisite; and in some cases for some persons, it may be expedient to bind and task themselves by a holy resolution to take so much time, at least every day for God's worship, also at such a time as may be judged most commodious from experience. And this may be a good help to keep in our treacherous hearts from delay or dallying; but to engage ourselves to a particular hour so punctually and unalterably, as not to take another, may not be so safe; partly, because our times are in God's hands, and we know not what intervening providence may fall in to prevent our performance, whereby conscience may be entangled in a perplexing labyrinth; besides, our outward occasions, and the frame of our spirits, may discover a greater fitness at another season; yet, though I would not have Christians bring a snare upon their souls by vowing, yet I humbly conceive that they may consult conveniences and design some time for that work and purpose, God willing, to keep an hour of prayer; and if they be hindered by a journey or any unexpected unavoidable occasions, they must mourn for it as their burden, redouble their diligence another time, not

plead needless diversions, lift up ejaculations to God, keep a praying frame of spirit, and God will graciously pardon and accept them.

3. *Case.* How may a Christian know that he enjoyeth communion with God in closet prayer?

Ans. Communion with God is twofold, (1.) As to graces. (2.) As to comforts. Sometimes a Christian may feel the joy of God's salvation, have the sweet manifestations of his favour, the smiles of his face, the seals of the Spirit, and lively springings of joy and transporting pleasures; these carry their own evidence along with them: but all have not these, nor any at all times; therefore the surest way is to inquire after communion with God, with reference to the exercise of grace in duty. Then hath a believer true fellowship with God, when by the gracious assistance of his Spirit the mind is knit to the object of worship, when the understanding is fruitful in spiritual thoughts, when the will and affections are carried out in strong and panting desires and longings after God, when the heart is thoroughly broken with a sense of sin, melted into godly sorrow, affected with the sweetness of pardoning grace, and ardently pleads with God for acceptance; also, when the graces of the Spirit are exercised in the duty, such as a holy awe and fear of God, faith, love, humility, zeal and fervency, and a willingness to forgive others, as well as to be forgiven by the Lord. Lastly, a soul may know when it hath communion with God, by the consequences of duty, as when the Christian is more vile in his own eyes, as Abraham was, gives God all the glory, sees and bewails his defects in the greatest enlargements, when the spirit is left in a better frame, and fitter to bear crosses, and perform after duties, &c. I do but hint these things.

4. *Case.* Suppose I have prayed and prayed, and find not my heart affected ; it is dead, dull, distracted, I do no good ; get no good in duty, I fear I offend God, what shall I do ?

Ans. Such a case is sad : yet consider,

(1.) It may be the case of gracious hearts ; David was so depressed and troubled, that he could not speak, Psalm lxxvii. 3, 4. God's best children are sometimes out of frame, and their spirits unfit for duty.

(2.) A total neglect will not mend the matter, nor help the frame of your hearts ; one sin will never cure another ; running from the fire is not the way to be warm ; your hearts are not better, but worse, by forbearance ; omission indisposeth.

(3.) Who knows but God may come at the next time ? Keep upon the royal exchange still, ply the oars, give God no rest, gratify not Satan by neglect. Tradesmen keep their markets, though for small gains : you will get something at last worth your pains ; they never were ashamed that have waited on him ; the issue will be good.

(4.) God may graciously accept thy obedience, though thou hast not sweet enlargement ; the obedience is thine, the enlargement God's : he is a free agent, and works when he pleaseth ; he loves to see poor souls tug and struggle with their own hearts, though they can get little forward, yet they would be better and do better. The Father takes it well when the child is striving to obey him, though it fall very far short ; he sees the spirit is willing, though the flesh be weak, and accepts of upright endeavours : nay, observe it, a Christian's conscientious attendance upon God, without a sensible enjoyment of his presence, may be more acceptable to God than when he hath the most sensible enjoyment ; because there is most obedience in such a

duty, but in the other case a Christian is as it were hired to performances by the earnest-penny of enjoyment. O, it is a brave thing to persevere in duty under discouragements; he that can trade when times are so dead, that all his wares lie upon his hand, surely has a great stock. So it is an evidence of much faith, love, and sincerity, if the soul can maintain this heavenly trade, when its sensible incomes are small. Yet when God thus withdraws from you, you must deeply lay it to heart, inquire the cause, make your peace with him, and ply the throne of grace with greater importunity. Thus much briefly, for these cases of conscience.

And now, beloved friends, I have dispatched this subject concerning closet prayer, what remains but that we should all seriously commence the constant practice of this duty? What do ministers preach sermons, or print books for? Is it to be seen or heard in public? is it to be applauded? or, is it not rather to do good to people's souls? And can people get any good by hearing a sound of words, or a complimentary reading what is written? Is there not something else required of you now, even a setting about the conscientious practice of what is before you? What say you, sirs, to this point? Is closet prayer a christian duty, or is it not? If it be not, why doth Christ direct us to the right manner of performance, and assure us that our Father will reward it openly? Will God reward any thing but commanded duty? There is no question but it is a duty; I challenge any man to disprove it now, and to stand to his assertion another day before the God of heaven: but I think none will deny it to be duty—and, sirs, dare any man that professeth religion, live in the gross neglect of plain duty? Do you think it is fit it should be done, and will you not do it? Shall your own tongues be brought in as witnesses

against yourselves? Will you be like that son that said, I go, sir, but went not? Shall God wait your leisure, and you will not give him a visit? Will you go into your closets to make up your accounts, and will you not reckon straight betwixt God and your souls? Dare you go from day to day under the guilt of a known sin? If you do not what you have read, this book will fly in the face of conscience another day. But I am most afraid, lest Christians trifle about this work, and shuffle it off after any fashion, and so put off God with a mere outside performance, to pacify conscience, without that warmth and life we should have in our closets. It is recorded of Luther, that he prayed every day three hours, and even then when his spirits were most lively, [*per tres horas, easque ad studia aptissimas.*] Nor were his closet prayers dull, careless, heartless; but so fervent and ardent, saith Melancthon, that those who stood under his window where he stood praying, might see his tears falling and dropping down. But O where is this zeal and ardency in our secret devotion? Are we not ready to drop asleep, even upon our knees? alas, how formal are we? The fire of God is wanting in our sacrifices: nay, do we not take God's name in vain many times, and know not what we say? O, why do we thus forget God's omnipresence and omniscience? Doth not he know our hearts, and should not we approve ourselves to God in our closets? Yea, doth not Satan stand under our closet windows, or rather at our elbow, and hear what we say to God in our closets? If you take not notice of your mistakes in closet prayer, Satan doth; and takes advantage by them. Indeed, I have heard some make this a scruple, whether they should in secret confess heart sins, lest Satan should be acquainted with what he knew not before, and so be furnished

with matter to accuse them ; but an ingenuous confession prevents Satan's accusation, because we have a promise of remission annexed thereunto, Rom. viii. 33, "And who shall lay any thing to the charge of justified persons ?" He hath little reason to take your confessions, and throw them in your teeth ; since these are both the means and evidence of pardon. But if you have any fear of that, you may do as Hannah did in prayer, speak in your hearts, and then Satan cannot tell what you say, but God doth. However, neglect not the duty ; for of this you may be sure, that Satan will obtain more advantage by omission or negligent performance, than by an ingenuous acknowledgment of heart sins, though he do hear you.

Sirs, awake to righteousness, rouse up yourselves to the work, put not off God or conscience with a negative answer : you may as well say, No, as pretend and promise to do it, and not perform ; begin the practice of it therefore this day, there is danger in delays ; if you do it not to-day, you will be more unfit to-morrow. At this instant, fall upon thy knees, beg a blessing upon this book for the good of thy soul and others, look upon closet prayer as thy privilege, as well as thy duty. It is a mercy thou mayest go to God as often as thou wilt, and for what thou needest. It is no small favour that God hath allowed thee the use of this privy key to open heaven's gates, when thou hast not the more public key of others to help thee in prayer ; yet this is thy encouragement, "Thy Father that sees in secret will reward thee openly."

A TREATISE
ON
CHRIST'S INTERCESSION;
WITH A
Practical Application.

THE PREFACE.

CHRISTIAN READER,

I HAVE great need to apologize for this my undertaking, partly because of king Solomon's caution, Eccl. xii. 12, "And further by these, my son, be admonished; in making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh:" and partly because I have already obtruded several practical treatises upon the world in this critical age. But, in the passage just quoted, I suppose the wise man has a reference to subjects natural, political, or polemical. As for practical truths of a truly spiritual nature, they lie in a small compass; so saith he, verse 13, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter, Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty, business, and happiness of man." True religion consists in a right principle and unreserved obedience, to which every soul should be devoted; and it also becomes ministers to preach and promote the doctrine which is according to godliness, to use wholesome words for people's edification, holding faith and a good conscience.* Nor is it inconsistent with their present work to transmit something to posterity by writing, that after their decease, generations to come may have the truths of God always in remembrance.† It is true, we have the sacred records of infallible scripture, but practical treatises of godly ministers have always been accounted most excellent expedients to propagate religion in the world, and have proved successful for attaining the end.

I have but a few reasons to assign for my present undertaking.

* 1 Tim. i. 4, 5, 19. vi. 3, 4.

† 2 Pet. i. 15.

1. The subject is exceedingly necessary ; our persons and our prayers would be lost, had we no intercessor ; we are accepted only in the Beloved ; if our Lord Jesus does not hand poor sinners to God, woe be to them ; no gospel doctrine is more necessary than this ; the very satisfaction of Christ will do us no good without his intercession.

2. Most people are ignorant of it, or forget it in their approaches to God ; when conscience, relations, or ministers, put them upon prayer, or sore afflictions or death force them to go to God by prayer, they understand little of the right mode of taking Christ along with them by faith, but go to God absolutely considered, or if they say for Christ's sake, it is but a compliment, they cannot be benefited by his mediation.

3. I find not, in all my acquaintance with books, any one treatise upon this subject ; systems of divinity mention it, and some others glance at it occasionally, but none that I have seen treat purposely on it, though it is one of the fundamental articles of our religion, and deserves serious consideration.

4. Providence hath cast me into a declining condition, and some infirmities which render me incapable of travelling abroad, and even among my neighbours, so that I cannot personally converse with my hearers, yet my heart is much carried out towards them, and to God for them, amongst whom I have laboured in public and private, above fifty years ; and having preached through the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, in relation to the great ordinance of the Lord's supper, and having finished it, I was moved, partly by own inclination, and partly by the importunity of some friends, to resume the thoughts of it, and put it into writing, which hath greatly increased and extended itself in my hands ; this point, I conceive, admits not of dispute, no such controversies having been raised about this part of Christ's priestly office as on the other about his satisfaction on the cross for the sins of men, and as I love not controversy, I need not meddle with the many intercessors of Papists, who distinguish between a mediator of satisfaction and a mediator of intercession, the former they say is proper to Christ, the latter is common to saints and angels.

Ah poor sinner ! how darest thou appear before the tremendous Jehovah ? Look to thy state and standing, tremble lest thou be found Christless, in duties, at death or judgment.

God is a consuming fire, thou art as dried stubble ; God a terrible Judge, thou art a guilty malefactor. When death sits upon thy lips, and thou must be gone into another world, Satan seizing thee, the law thundering, conscience accusing, worldly comforts leaving thee, divine vengeance meeting thee, as thou art passing out of time into eternal torments—what wilt thou do ? Then, if not before, “ the sinners in Zion are afraid, fearfulness surpriseth the hypocrites.” Oh then your “ hearts will meditate terror,” asking, “ Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire ? Who amongst us shall dwell with the everlasting burnings ?” * But there you must dwell, there you must live in misery whether you will or not; death will not put an end to your being, but well-being. How glad would you be to be annihilated ? Oh, you will say, that I might lie in hell a thousand years, and even a thousand thousand years endure intolerable torments, so that after millions of years I might be set at liberty ; no, no, the door is shut, the gulf is fixed, there you are, there you are like to abide for evermore. Oh that you were wise to consider these things betimes, before they be for ever hid from your eyes. Ministers intercede for God with you to gain your consent, the Spirit strives with you, conscience checks, God affords helps, all these will be your accusers another day if you close not with Christ.

Particularly, my poor neighbours and hearers, let me now bespeak you with all the tenderness of christian affection, as one going shortly to give up his accounts. Shall I meet you at the right hand of the Judge among the sheep, or the left hand with the goats ? Whether would you hear, “ Come ye blessed,” or “ Go ye cursed ?” Are you content to be banished from God, or desirous to be admitted into everlasting communion with him ? Look on these as dying words of your aged pastor. O that he may meet with comfort another day, that he that sowed, and such as reaped may rejoice together.

I have but a few hints to leave with you, which I desire you to receive as the last legacy of a dying man, a friend, a preacher.

1. Thoroughly study your lost and lapsed state by your birth-sin ; you are estranged from God, and so continuing must

* Isaiah xxxiii. 14, 18.

be for ever banished from him at death : you must be changed or damned. *

2. " Search the Scriptures," there you find the way to heaven opened, the character of the saved, the black traits of the lost, with their promises, precepts, and threatenings ; lean not on your own fancies, but divine oracles. †

3. Examine your consciences ; enter into the secrets of your hearts, commune with them, bring your hearts to the rule and touchstone, spend some time alone upon it, be faithful and impartial, tremble at hazarding a mistake. ‡

4. Accuse and condemn yourselves, you will find great reason ; your sins are obvious to God and conscience, if you hide them, they will undermine you ; there are hopes that God will clear you, if you censure yourselves. ||

5. Renounce every sin ; it is sin that separates betwixt God and you, that is dragging you to hell, that is provoking the Most High against you ; crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts. §

6. Enter into a covenant with God ; solemnly renew your baptismal covenant ; take God as your God, and give up yourselves to him, defer not one day, tell the Lord you are his by many obligations. ¶

7. Put no confidence in yourselves, or in any thing of your own ; judge yourselves most unworthy of the high favour of covenant relationship ; you may and must account yourselves even as dead dogs before God. **

8. Join with God's people ; stand not at a distance from those that God owns ; renounce vain persons whom God rejects, sit not with them, but love and choose the society of saints for whom Christ pleads. ††

9. Be much in prayer ; plead with God for a spirit of grace : Christ is God's gift, be thankful for him, beg of God that

* Ps. lviii. 3. Rom. vi. 23. iii. 19, 23. Matt. xviii. 3.

† John v. 39. ii. 22. Acts xvii. 11.

‡ Ps. iv. 4. 2 Cor. xiii. 5. Gal. vi. 4. Zeph. ii. 3.

|| 1 John iii. 20. 1 Cor. xi. 31. Prov. xxviii. 13. 1 John i. 8.

§ Isa. lix. 2.

¶ Ps. l. 5. Isa. xlv. 5. 2 Cor. viii. 5.

** Ps. cxvi. 16. Matt. viii. 8. xv. 27. Luke vii. 44. 2 Sam. ix. 8.

†† Ps. xxvi. 4. cxix. 63. Phil. ii. 15.

through him you may have pardon, peace, and heaven, without money and without price: will you not ask? *

10. Rest not satisfied without saving faith which gives interest in Christ: remember all men have not faith; some have a faith but not sincere; yet it is absolutely necessary, there is no living, no dying without faith. †

I only advert to these things at present, read the rest in this ensuing Treatise.

As for you that have a principle of grace, an interest in Christ, admire the riches of God's grace in him, still say, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift:" ‡ it is the greatest gift that ever came out of the hands of God, or that ever was in the hands of man, without whom all gifts are but giftless gifts. Nothing you have will do you good without him, nothing you do is accepted without him. O admirable grace! Christ is the covert that shelters you from God's wrath: he is the King's favourite that makes you welcome into the King of Heaven's presence. It was for you he came from heaven to earth; it is for you that he is gone from earth to heaven, to prepare room and mansions for you; ¶ it was for you that he was man, and acts as God. It is worth observing that twice did that excellent word sound from heaven, once at our Lord's baptism, and again at his transfiguration, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." § Mark it, he doth not say, with whom, as with his person, but in whom; that is, all that have interest in him, and come to God through him. O happy souls, come when you will, come in whatever condition you may be, and you may find relief and release. Be not discouraged with the splendour of divine and dazzling glory: God appears in the cloud on the mercy-seat, and the mercy-seat is above upon the ark, to secure sinners from the rigour of the law, and then Jehovah will meet sinners and commune with them. ¶¶

This is admirable condescension in God, and advancement of a Christian. I may say to you, "Why stand you gazing up unto heaven?" ** Be not idle spectators, but really cultivators of piety; imitate the blessed Jesus in his life, improve his

* John iv. 10. Isa. lv. 1. Rev. iii. 18.

† Eph. iii. 17. 2 Thess. iii. 2. Heb. xi. 6.

‡ 2 Cor. ix. 15. ¶ John xiv. 2.

§ Matt. iii. 17. xvii. 5.

¶ Lev. xvi. 2. Exod. xxv. 21, 22.

** Acts i. 11.

death and resurrection, follow him in your holy meditations and ardent affections, send your prayers and praises after him, and run patiently this race that is set before you, that you may arrive in the celestial Canaan, at the new Jerusalem, the city of the great King, where you shall be "before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple, and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among you."* That this may be the result of all our adorations of the true God, through Christ, is the prayer of,

Thy soul's servant in the gospel,

OLIVER HEYWOOD.

* Rev. vii. 15.

CHRIST'S INTERCESSION.

ISAIAH LIII. 12.

Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors, and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

CHAP. I.

INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS.

THIS is an excellent chapter, referring to the blessed Saviour of mankind, giving an account of his birth, outward abject appearance, voluntary humiliation, bitter sufferings, together with the cause thereof, the persons for whom, together with their benefit thereby, his patience under all his sorrows, his violent death, his burial, his innocency, God's pleasure and design in all, the efficacy and blessed fruits of his undertaking, in the conversion and justification of sinners, and the method of free grace in the application of all the work of our blessed Redeemer.

The last is strongly expressed in the verse which I have read, including two considerations:—

I. The promise to divide him a portion with the

great, and the spoil with the strong; however low he might be, he should be highly exalted, lead captivity captive, and give gifts to men, even to the rebellious;* gifts of grace and glory, privileges which are the fruits of his purchase; and these are not merely free gifts from the Father, but merited by Christ at a dear rate, therefore it is added, "Because he hath poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors."

But here the question is asked, Whether did Christ by his sufferings merit this advancement? In reply I answer:—

1. Christ did not merit the personal union of the divine and human natures, or his original perfections, or his happiness with his Father, these were essential to him, he was invested with these before he suffered, and merit must precede reward.

2. Yet we may say that Christ's humiliation was the meritorious cause of his exaltation, so it is said, Phil. ii. 6—9, "He humbled himself—wherefore God also hath highly exalted him." But still, this must be understood, not so much with respect to his person, as to his church, which is his mystical body, over whom he is head, and which he quickens together with himself, "raising us up, and making us sit together, in heavenly places in Christ," Eph. ii. 5, 6. This is a great truth, yet some so understand the text, that these sufferings precede this advancement, not so much by order of causality as of antecedency, considering his exaltation as the consequence of his passion.

But however it is clear from the words:—

1. That Jesus Christ must be abased before he was exalted.

This is showed by the mouth of all the prophets,

* Eph. iv. 8. Psal. lxxviii. 18.

that Christ must suffer, Acts iii. 18. And this was the sum of apostle's preaching, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead, Acts xvii. 3.

2. Christ's sufferings contained a pouring out of his soul unto death.

This refers to the bloody sacrifices under the law, given to Israel, which sacrifices were offered upon the altar, to make an atonement for their souls, Lev. xvii. 11. Thus Christ truly died, [*cum ejus evacuarentur venæ, sanguisque fundaretur*] when the blood of his veins was shed, especially when the soldier pierced his side, "and forthwith came there forth blood and water," John xix. 34. It was an undoubted death, that there might be certain and effectual fruits of his death.

3. Jesus Christ was "numbered with the transgressors."

He that was best was numbered with the worst; he was reputed a worse person than Barabbas a vile murderer, John xviii. 40. He was crucified betwixt two thieves as the very ringleader of them, so the scripture was fulfilled, "He was numbered with the transgressors," Mark xv. 27, 28. Yea, he was rejected by most classes of men, he was esteemed most despicable, so that his own received him not.* But O let Christ be the more precious in our account, the more vile he became for us, 1 Pet. ii. 7.

4. Christ "bare the sins of many."

This load was laid on the innocent Jesus, he was made sin for us who knew no sin, 2 Cor. v. 21. He bore the burden which we must have borne, and which would have sunk us into eternal torments; yea, it would have sunk him but that he was the infinite God, and could bear infinite weight, and could satisfy infinite

* Isa. liii. 3. John i. 11.

justice; for it was the blood of God, of him that is God, Acts xx. 28.

5. Jesus Christ is advanced to the highest dignity after his sufferings,

When God raised Christ from the dead, he set him at his own right hand in heavenly places, far above all principalities.—Eph. i. 20, 21. There he sits on the right hand of the Majesty on high; from thence he will come to judge the quick and the dead.*

6. The exalted Jesus scatters his gifts or donatives among the sons of men.

This alludes to the triumphs of the Romans, wherein they scattered their bounty, the noble fruits of their large spoils. So doth Christ dispense and disperse precious gifts and gratuities,† the fruits of his glorious resurrection, ascension and session at God's right hand, sending forth ministers ordinary and extraordinary, instituting sacraments, seals of the covenant, sending down the Holy Ghost in cloven tongues, communicating spiritual grace, valuable privileges to believers, &c.

7. The great and strong, as well as poor and weak, need those important gifts of our exalted Jesus.

The great and strong may be considered:—

(1.) Properly in a natural sense: kings and princes are said to see his glory, Isa. lxii. 2, kings' daughters to be among his honourable women, yea the rich among the people intreat his favour,‡ this was literally accomplished in Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea an honourable counsellor, who were Christ's disciples.

(2.) Figuratively: the souls that have true grace, though poor in the world, are yet rich in faith and heirs of a kingdom; || even if persons be conceited of their goodness, and think themselves rich and strong he can batter down their confidence, make them poor in spirit,

* Heb. i. 3. † Eph. iv. 11. ‡ Psal. xlv. 9, 12. || Jam. ii. 5.

and fill them with true spiritual riches, as he did Paul and many others.

Thus much for Christ's humiliation, and the distribution of his spoils, the consideration of which I purposely wave.

II. The latter blessed fruit of Christ's exaltation, consequent upon his sufferings, is his intercession, a delightful subject little treated on and less considered; therefore I shall on purpose take it into serious consideration. The word [פָּנַע] signifies *occurrere*, to meet, obstruct, or hinder another's motion; and it is taken sometimes in a bad sense, as when a man hinders another in doing good, but here it is taken in a good sense, for Jesus Christ stopping the wrath of God that comes forth against poor sinners, and meeting God with a design to speak a good word for poor supplicants, so some render it in this sense, [*pro prævaricatoribus oravit, rogavit, obviam ivit, intercessit*] that Christ prayed, besought the father, met him with entreaties and intercessions, to be gracious to poor sinners, shewing him the value of his blood and sufferings.

Doct. That Christ and Christ alone makes intercession for transgressors.

Transgressors of God's holy law have a High Priest in heaven to intercede for them: in handling this point, I shall shew,

1. What this intercession is.
 2. For what transgressors Christ intercedes.
 3. How our Lord manageth this intercession.
 4. Why Christ only is intercessor.
- And so make application.

CHAP. II.

ON THE CHARACTER OF OUR INTERCESSOR, AND THE IMPORT OF INTERCESSION.

THE intercessor here meant is Christ himself in his own person, for the Holy Ghost, the third person of the Trinity is also in some sense an intercessor; so Christ saith, "I will pray the Father, and he will give you [*ἄλλον παράκλητον*] another paraclete, or comforter."* But it is the same word which is applied to Christ, 1 John ii. 1, and rendered advocate—"If any man sin, we have an advocate [*παράκλητον*] with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Christ is the advocate without us, the Holy Ghost within, and though they always go together, yet they are thus distinguished:—

1. According to the economy of salvation, Jesus Christ principally negotiates the affairs of believers with God the Father; the Holy Ghost is the divine agent with believers, to manage God's work in the world,—to testify of Christ, John xv. 26,—to reprove the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, John xvi. 8; and with respect to the church, to teach them all things, John xiv. 26,—to guide them into all truth, xvi. 13,—to comfort their hearts, therefore he is often called, "The Comforter."

2. Jesus Christ is in heaven sitting at God's right hand, and makes intercession for us, Rom. viii. 34. But the Holy Ghost doth make intercession, or interpellation, with the saints, by directing them what to say in prayer, how to speak, helping their infirmities "with groanings which cannot be uttered," Rom. viii.

* John xiv. 16.

26. The Spirit indites the Christian's prayers for him, this is the blessed fruit of Christ's purchase ; hence the Spirit is called the Spirit of his Son, sent forth by God into our hearts, "crying Abba, Father," Gal. iv. 6. Thus all the persons of the sacred Trinity carry on the same design.

But this work of intercession is more peculiarly appropriated to Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity.

And this word applied to Christ in the New Testament, where he is denominated *παράκλητος*, advocate or intercessor, hath a fourfold signification.

1. It signifies a deprecator, that is, one that deprecates evil that it may not fall upon another ; so Jer. xviii. 20, "Remember that I stood before thee to speak good for them, to turn away thy wrath from them." This is Christ's work by impetration and intercession, "to deliver us from the wrath to come."* O what flames of wrath would seize on us, did not Christ restrain them ! It was this angel of the covenant that prevailed with God, for turning away his wrath from Jerusalem : "Jehovah answered the angel with good words and comfortable words," Zech. i. 12, 13. Christ's prayer is always prevalent.

2. It means (*exhortator*) an exhorter, a persuader, and one that undertakes to prevail with another. The word also doth signify consolation ; so Barnabas is called *υἱὸς παρακλήσεως*, "a son of consolation," Acts iv. 36, so we read it : but it may as well be read, the son of exhortation, for he was very expert in persuading and exhorting—Acts xi. 23, 24, "He exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord : " and it was effectual, for much people were added to the Lord. Thus effectual are Christ's

* 1 Thess. i. 10.

arguments with his Father for believers, as we shall hear anon.

3. The word signifies (*patronus*) patron, defender, or maintainer of another's person and cause, and this is the same with his being an advocate in a court of judicature, to vindicate another's right or title according to law. Thus Christ doth undertake the patronage of his despised saints, against all those that would in any case wrong or abuse them; thus all God's children may in him find grace to help them in time of need, Heb. iv. 16. It is of Christ that the church in all ages hath confidently asserted, "The Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king, he will save us."—Isa. xxxiii. 22.

Once more, the word is employed to denote (*intercessor, interlocutor*) an intercessor or speaker on both sides, especially betwixt two parties that have had differences, who interposeth betwixt them to make them friends, and take up the controversy; one that is concerned for both sides, and hath considerable interest in them, and doth offer his mediation: Job calls such a one a surety, chap. ix. 33, "Neither is there any days' man betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both." The word in Hebrew [מֹכִיחַ] cometh from a root that signifieth to argue or reprove, such a one as may state the question right between us: thus the Lord himself was the umpire betwixt Laban and Jacob, in rebuking Laban:* thus doth our blessed Jesus step up to be arbitrator, mediator, and referee betwixt God and sinners. This is the case; God and man are at variance in consequence of Adam's apostacy. "Now," saith the apostle, Gal. iii. 20, "a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one;" he appears the same wise, just, holy God, under every dispensation of reli-

* Gen. xxxi. 24.

gion, there is no difference among the persons of the sacred Trinity; but there is a sad controversy commenced betwixt a righteous God and sinning man. How must these be made friends? Infinite love and wisdom have found out an expedient that is sufficient to effect it, even the second person of the Trinity, assuming the nature of man, and interposing two ways:—

(1.) By suffering the penalty that man had deserved, and satisfying justice by his meritorious oblation of himself; “He offered himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour,” Eph. v. 2; “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree;” * “in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins:” † and thus he hath reconciled God and man by his death on the cross. ‡ This is the mystery of mysteries, the mercy of mercies. But this is not the point on which I am now to speak, but another founded upon it, which is—

(2.) The intercession of Christ now in heaven; he is our advocate, because he is the propitiation for our sins, 1 John ii. 1, 2. Thus Christ is now in heaven to pursue the same design he had upon the cross, so that Christ’s intercession sets out the perpetual efficacy of his sacrifice, and the continual application of it to believers, himself demanding from his Father for him and his, what was formerly merited and now looked on as a debt due in consequence of what Christ hath done and suffered. Hence it is said, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” || It is mercy to us, but justice to Christ, who hath merited it for us, and doth claim it as the fruit of his purchase.

Yet more particularly, this intercession is twofold :
1. Interpretative or virtual ; 2. Direct.

* 1 Pet. ii. 24. † Eph. i. 7. ‡ Col. i. 21, 22. || 1 John i. 9.

1. Our Lord makes intercession more objectively and interpretatively or virtually, and this is by presenting himself to God in heaven; so saith that remarkable text, Heb. ix. 24, "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." The high priests of old went into the holy of holies, and bore the names of the twelve tribes upon their breast-plate for a memorial before the Lord, Exod. xxviii. 30. Our Lord answers this exactly, and having finished his suffering work on earth, the justice of God was fully satisfied, and he now presents himself to the Father, in the name and room of all believers, and virtually speaks this language—"Here I am, having finished the work thou gavest me to do."* I have fulfilled all righteousness, accomplished prophecies, answered the types, and here I am demanding by right what thou hast promised me, not only for myself, but for those whom thou assignedst to me by the covenant of redemption before the foundation of the world; and this he demands as due debt, because an equivalent price is paid and justice itself can demand no more: though it came freely to us, yet was bought at a dear rate by Christ. See Rom. iii. 24—26.

2. Formally, properly, and directly, Christ makes intercession by praying for us. Yet this must not be understood literally, as though Christ did now, after the manner of humble supplicants, kneel down or prostrate himself, as he did in the days of his flesh, with strong crying and tears:† but some way making known his desires to his Father for the good of saints, whether by words or signs who can tell? but in such a way as is suitable to his glorified state. Divines generally

* John xvii. 4.

† Matt. xxvi. 39. Heb. v. 7.

conclude that Christ's intercession is his most gracious will and pleasure, strongly and immoveably expressed, that all his members, through the perpetual virtue of his sacrifice may be accepted of the Father, and admitted with him into heavenly mansions.* This is sufficient for us to know, only we may be sure as it is heavenly and glorious, so it is always prevalent and efficacious.

It may be further asked, whether Christ make intercession as God or as man? The reason of this doubt is, because it is said, 1 Tim. ii. 5, "There is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus."

I answer, that doth not exclude his deity, but only assures believers of his readiness to undertake our cause because he is so near akin to us, being flesh of our flesh, and cannot deny our suits, or refuse to undertake our patronage, or intercession for us. He that put himself so near us in his incarnation, will not be a stranger now in interposing with the Father on our behalf.

But, as mediator betwixt God and man, it was absolutely necessary he should partake of both natures in his passion and satisfaction, for if he had not been man he could not have suffered, and if he had not been God he could not have satisfied: he must be God's fellow, and equal with God, † or he could not have managed these great works both on God's behalf and man's, therefore he saith, John x. 30, "I and my Father are one"—not only one in consent, but in essence, of one nature, and carry on the same design. "And no man knoweth the Father but the Son;" ‡ he was in the bosom of the Father, || and so knows his mind, and their mutual counsels, and will ask nothing but what is con-

* John xiv. 2; 3.

† Zech. xiii. 7. Phil. ii. 6.

‡ Matt. xi. 27.

|| John i. 18.

sistent with his will. The Son of man was in heaven as to his Godhead, even while his manhood was upon earth, and now his manhood is in heaven, his Godhead is with his church to the end of the world.* Besides, as the altar sanctifies the gift,† so the Godhead of Christ is that blessed altar that makes his death and our offerings acceptable to God; “we have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat, that serve the tabernacle,” Heb. xiii. 10: and “by him let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually,” ver. 15.

If it be asked, when Jesus Christ took this office upon him to be mediator or intercessor? I answer,

1. From all eternity in God’s decree or purpose, or in that covenant of redemption, contrived and agreed upon betwixt the Father and the Son, to which Christ consented; Psalm xl. 7, 8, “Then said I, Lo I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me,” which the apostle interprets of Christ, Heb. x. 7, 9; and God the Father consents to it, and promised to Christ before the world began, what he would do for him and by him.‡ Accordingly, all believers are predestinated to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ, and therefore are accepted in the Beloved, Eph. i. 4—6.

2. From the beginning of the world, as soon as Adam fell from God. God had threatened man, “in the day thou eatest, thou shalt die the death” ||—how came it then to pass that Adam lived? Doubtless, it was by virtue of Christ’s intercession, who was the promised seed, of whom God saith to the serpent, “It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel;”§ meaning that Satan should put Christ to death, and Christ should gloriously triumph over the devil, both personally and mystically in his members: and this is

* John iii. 13 Matt. xxviii. 18, 20.

† Matt. xxiii. 17.

‡ Tit. i. 2.

|| Gen. ii. 17.

§ Gen. iii. 15.

the meaning of that passage, Rev. xiii. 8, which asserts that "the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world;" that is, Christ's satisfaction and intercession have been effectual for the salvation of believers in all ages, even before he appeared in the world, all sacrifices having referred to him.

3. In the fulness of time, when he was incarnate and manifested in the flesh. "The fulness of time is now come," as the apostle saith, Gal. iv. 4, 5; and though his main work was to redeem sinners, yet he preached the gospel, wrought miracles, and even in those days of his flesh, "offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears," Heb. v. 7, upon several occasions, as I shall shew hereafter.

4. Now he is exalted to heaven, our Lord is in his proper element of intercession. So saith the apostle, Rom. viii. 34, "It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again, who is ever at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us:" that is his employment and our happiness. Yea, "upon his right hand doth stand the queen in gold of Ophir."* So pleased is Christ with his church and gracious souls, that he hath their persons and concerns always present with him; this, this is the happiness of believers. This is a high privilege, a doctrine worth studying, for next to Christ's satisfaction upon the cross, a Christian's safety lies in Christ's intercession: Heb. vii. 25, "Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Observe it, the completing of our salvation much depends upon Christ's intercession.

* Psalm xlv. 9.

CHAP. III.

ON THE OBJECTS OF CHRIST'S INTERCESSION DENOMINATED TRANSGRESSORS.

A SECOND inquiry is, who are those that Christ makes intercession for?

The text saith they are transgressors, sinful men, that are fallen from God.

Quest. Doth not Christ make intercession for the holy angels, that keep their standing?

Answ. The scripture saith of Christ, that verily he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham, Heb. ii. 16.

It is a disputable point, whether Christ intercede for any except those that he redeemed; but the angels that never fell need no redemption, and the fallen angels are in a hopeless state—"They are reserved in everlasting chains under darkness."* As for the good angels, though they be perfect creatures, yet they are but creatures, and therefore mutable; and the language of scripture is, "His angels he chargeth with folly,"† that is, comparatively, with respect to himself, who only hath immortality.‡ The angels, though not actually yet potentially, may be charged with folly: they might possibly fall, but now they stand. Mr. Perkins saith,|| it cannot, however, be proved that they stand by the virtue of Christ's redemption, but they are under him as he is their Lord and King, and by the power of Christ, as he is God and their God, they are confirmed. Yet we may truly say that the angels are confirmed by Christ's mediation. Look on

* Jude, 6.

† John iv. 18. Vid. Caryl. in loc.

‡ 1 Tim. vi. 16.

|| Perk. on Creed, 202.

the angels in their creation, and they were naturally blessed, and from that they might fall, and many of them did ; but now look upon them in a supernatural blessedness, which consists in the vision of God, which they have obtained by Christ ; from this they cannot fall, and so are by grace become immutable. Thus Christ is a confirmer and supporter of the angels, which is by his intercession, so some understand, Col. i. 20.

But the persons for whom Christ particularly makes intercession are men, and transgressing men ; “ he made intercession for the transgressors.” Now, there are two sorts of transgressors among men : graceless, unconverted sinners—real saints.

1. Unconverted souls, strangers to God, that are still unsanctified, in their natural state, never yet in covenant with God. Now, it is a great question whether Christ makes intercession for these, because he saith, John xvii. 9, “ I pray for them, I pray not for the world, but for them that thou hast given me, for they are thine.” By “ the world,” may be meant those that are at present unbelievers as the rest of the world are, for these he prayeth that they should believe, as he had before prayed for those that actually did believe : but he did not pray for the finally impenitent, or those that should die unbelievers.

Yet there are two cases wherein Christ is said to pray for wicked transgressors.

(1.) For sparing them and giving them time and means of repentance, and many outward mercies ; so it is said of the dresser of the vineyard, when justice bids him cut down the fig-tree, Luke xiii. 7, 8, he answers, “ Lord, let it alone this year also.” The worst of men are indebted to Christ for their lives, seasons of grace, and calls to repent. O that men thought of this !

(2.) Christ prayed for his murderers and worst of

persecutors : “ Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”—Luke xxiii. 34. Not that Jesus prayed for pardon absolutely, without respect to their repentance, but this is included, and his prayer was answered in the many thousands converted after his ascension.* Christ in heaven intercedes with his Father for the application of his work of redemption : his purchase prepares a plaster, his intercession applies it.

2. Another class of transgressors are those that are truly godly ; it is for them that he properly and directly makes intercession, as members of his body, purchased by him. This he doth for them in a peculiar manner.

You will say, Are sanctified souls transgressors ?

I answer, Yes. The best daily sin, and transgress God’s law in thought, word, and deed : “ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us ;” and “ sin is a transgression of the law :”† only there are sins of wilfulness and sins of weakness. Sin hath not dominion over a child of God.‡ Every child of God is conscious to himself of great offences, and may sadly lament with the church, Psalm lxxv. 3, “ Iniquities prevail against us ; as for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away :” this is through Christ’s merits and intercession. This is a mystery.

Quest. How shall we know what our Lord prays for now, in the highest heavens, on the behalf of believers ?

Answ. We must be regulated by scripture line in this matter ; and the best way to ascertain it is, to observe what was Christ’s prayer for his church when he was on earth, and no doubt he pursues the same design now he is in heaven.

* Acts ii. 41, 47. † 1 John i. 8. iii. 4. ‡ Rom. vi. 14.

Now we may form some conjecture respecting it, by observing these few particulars :—

1. He says plainly, John xiv. 16, “I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you for ever.” O blessed legacy! It is true, the influences of the Spirit came down in an extraordinary manner upon the blessed apostles and primitive saints; but all God’s children may expect the effusion thereof according to their measure, a spirit of conviction, illumination, and sanctification, of prayer and supplication, of assurance and satisfaction: you may expect this blessed Spirit to descend into your hearts as a precious fruit of Christ’s intercession.*

2. Audience of our prayers: “Whatsoever ye ask in my name, that will I do,” John xiv. 13, 14. This he doubles for greater security. Yea, there are two extraordinary expressions in John xvi. 23, “In that day you shall ask me nothing;” which some take for resolution in case of doubting, after the Spirit is poured down, which shall teach all things.† Hitherto they had asked nothing comparatively, ver. 24. Nay, he saith, “I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father himself loveth you,” ver. 26, 27. There is a mighty inclination in God’s heart to hear you of himself, besides my intercession, so that you need not fear audience.

3. Clear discoveries of God. John xiv. 20, “At that day you shall know that I am in the Father, and you in me, and I in you.” This is in answer to the good Philip’s request, ver. 8, “Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.” It is true, Christ himself upon earth was the most lively image and portraiture of the Father,‡ but the Spirit makes further and fuller discoveries of God and Christ, ver. 21, “I will manifest

* Rom. viii. 9. Gal. iv. 6. † 1 John ii. 27. ‡ John xvi. 15.

myself to him;" yea, ver. 23, "we will come unto him," that is, the Father and Son, "and make our abode with him."

4. A spirit of remembrance. John xiv. 26, "He," that is, the Spirit, "shall teach you all things;" namely, all things necessary to salvation, edification, or consolation; "and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." O what a privilege is this to fortify our slippery memories, and bring up truths, as seed sown in the earth, to a blessed harvest! Thus Paul recollects a passage that our Saviour spake, no where else recorded, Acts xx. 35. Doubtless his disciples reflected on many things that Christ did and spake, which were not written.* And thus a seasonable remembrance is a fruit of Christ's intercession, which is a very great mercy.

5. Sweet peace and contentment in the spirits of believers. John xiv. 27, "Peace I leave with you." This is Christ's legacy, and no doubt but he will take care for having it dispensed to all his people. In the world they must have tribulation,† but in him they shall have peace, that peace which passeth all understanding. O what a calm doth Christ make in the conscience of a perplexed sinner—centering the soul upon the Rock of Ages! You can have no solid peace but by this method, "being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ," Rom. v. 1.

6. Preservation from infection in the world, or prejudice by it. John xvii. 11, "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those that thou hast given me;" ver. 15, "I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil." O blessed word! Alas, we daily walk among snares and traps, allurements of a sinning world, oppo-

* John xx. 30.

† John xvi. 33.

sitions of a persecuting world, and temptations of Satan; and we have treacherous hearts, that are as tinder to those baits and sparks, unless divine grace prevent us : it is this that Jesus Christ now prays for on our behalf.

7. Union and communion of saints. John xvii. 11, "That they might be one, as we are." And this extends to all the saints in all ages ; ver. 21, "That they all might be one, as thou Father art in me, and I in thee." As there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and all real saints are one mystical body, so Christ prays that they may be one in opinion respecting all fundamental truths, one in endeared affection to each other, and join in one mutual communion. O when shall this prayer be heard, that all that fear God may "be kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another."*

8. Further sanctification. John xvii. 17, "Sanctify them through thy truth : thy word is truth." Yea, ver. 19, "For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified." Our Lord was to this purpose set apart to his mediatorial work, to be both priest and sacrifice, for the purpose of consecrating his saints to be a kingdom of priests, and to be more and more sanctified, purified from corruption, and dedicated to God. O what a blessed design is he driving on, "that we may be holy as he is holy,"† and at last arrive at perfection in holiness.

9. Conversion of more souls to God. John xvii. 20, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe through their word." There are two things hinted in this text : (1.) That Christ prays for the actual conversion of those that were given to him by everlasting love : they shall at last be effectually brought home by the means of grace ; John x. 16,

* Rom. xii. 10.

† 1 Pet. i. 16.

“Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold ; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice.” We poor Gentiles were God’s sheep in the counsels of heaven, to whom the gospel was shortly to be sent, and upon whom it must be effectual. O blessed day ! O happy design ! when “more must be the children of the desolate, than the children of the married wife ;” * that is, the Jewish church. This is the fruit of Christ’s purchase and intercession. (2.) He prays for them when they are believers ; that the Lord would receive them, pardon and save them, that none of them might perish, but that all should have everlasting life. †

10. Christ intercedes for all his, that they may ascend with him into heaven. John xvii. 24, “Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me.” This is the top-stone of the Christian’s happiness. No doubt Christ ascended into heaven, not only for himself but for his church, and that not only to represent them, for “he hath made them sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus ;” ‡ but he is gone before into those heavenly mansions to prepare a place for them, John xiv. 2, 3. And he looks on himself as not complete till all his followers be gathered to him ; he therefore prays for their perfect sanctification and admission by death into glory ; and then they shall be glorified together || with him, in their souls at death, in their bodies and souls at the resurrection.

Thus I have briefly hinted at the matter of Christ’s intercession in heaven being answerable to the petitions he presented to his Father upon earth, so far as we may conjecture by analogy when he is still carrying on the same design.

* Isa. liv. 1, 2. † John x. 28. ‡ Eph. ii. 6. || Rom. viii. 17.

CHAP. IV.

THE MANNER IN WHICH CHRIST MANAGETH THIS OFFICE OF INTERCESSION.

THE third general division relates to the manner in which our blessed Jesus manageth this glorious undertaking of interceding for his church, or particular believers.

I told you this word imports our Lord's being an advocate, and as an advocate he undertakes the patronage of a believer's person and cause, to bring him off clear before a court of judicature, to which it alludes. I shall accordingly prosecute it under these four particulars:—

1. An advocate is to hear the case stated.
2. He is to give counsel to his client.
3. To plead the equity of the cause.
4. To oppose the adversary, and to answer all accusations.

1. A solicitor, advocate, or intercessor, is to be thoroughly acquainted with the cause on all sides, he must not go blindfold about so important an affair, he must see to evidences, examine witnesses, weigh all circumstances, and to these things he must attend with due care, wisdom, and patience, that he may give a right judgment; he must also be well versed in the law, that he may legally manage the cause.

This is the case in the intercession of our Lord Jesus. He carefully regards what the soul which is his client, hath to say; Jer. xxxi. 18, "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning herself."* Christ as God knows the secret workings of the heart, he lays his ear at the saint's closet door; nay, he that searcheth the

* *Heb.* "In hearing I have heard."

the heart knows the mind of the spirit;* and saith to the poor client as Absalom in compliment, “see thy matters are good and right;”† for our Lord will not undertake a bad cause; nay, he will not only understand the client’s case, but make the client to understand it himself, else he will challenge him, and say, you know not what you ask. Observe this, our advocate doth not only understand law and justice, but he also instructs us in reference to what we must ask of God; and therefore we should come to him and say, “Lord, teach us to pray.”‡ He will not suffer us to espouse a wrong cause, no more than he will patronize us therein, but he will rectify our mistakes, regulate our suits, and then undertake the cause for us; and as he hears the case stated by the client, so he hears what the judge saith to the case. God is righteous; “Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?”|| Our Lord Jesus understands both sides, and will see to it that nothing in this whole affair be done to the prejudice of either party.

2. The work of an advocate is to declare in the court, what is law, as well as know it, he must declare in open court before witnesses, how matters stand on both sides; thus doth our Lord—on God’s part he declares God’s displeasure against the sinner for violating the covenant of works, and the death, and the curse, due to him for it. As many as are of the works of the law are under a curse;§ we are all dead and condemned by the first covenant, children of wrath as all others are;¶ and then our Lord produceth another covenant, the law of grace, and confirms it, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned, and the wrath of God

* Rom. viii. 26, 27.

† 2 Sam. xv. 3.

‡ Luke xi. 1.

|| Gen. xviii. 25.

§ Gal. iii. 10.

¶ Eph. ii. 3.

abides upon him :” * this Christ declares before all in open court, that none may plead ignorance, and gives counsel to the client to look to the sincerity of his faith and repentance, or else he is a lost sinner, notwithstanding all the provision Jesus Christ hath made in the gospel dispensation. Thus the blessed Jesus is the counsellor, Isa. ix. 6, and advises his client what method to take, that he may be *rectus in curia*, found right and upon good terms in the court of heaven.

3. And when the poor sinner hath truly embraced Christ upon these terms, then our advocate pleads the equity and legality of the procedure, in justifying and acquitting the sinner according to this law of grace in the gospel dispensation, and declares that God may *salvâ justitiâ*, notwithstanding infinite justice, pardon the condemned prisoner, because an infinite price is paid for him, even the blood of God † (or of him who is God,) which is fully commensurate with divine requirements, the surety satisfies for the creditor, the king’s son dies for the malefactor at the bar, and demands a release for him according to law, so that our dear Lord makes that bold challenge in Isa. l. 7—9. “The Lord God will help me, who is he that shall condemn? He is near that justifieth me, who will contend with me?” I have paid the utmost farthing, justice itself cannot demand more. I am able save to the uttermost all that come to God by me, ‡ none shall perish for want of full satisfaction. I have given myself for sinners, and this is an offering, and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour ; || God himself can ask no more, so that now I demand spiritual blessings as a debt, due upon my undertaking, through rich grace and mercy to the sinner. O blessed contrivance,

* Mark xvi. 16. John iii. 36.

† Acts xx. 28.

‡ Heb. vii. 25.

|| Eph. v. 2.

and hence it is that the pardoning of a believing sinner united to Christ, is declared to be an act of God's righteousness; Rom. iii. 25, 26, "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." It is an excellent text, and repeated for greater emphasis. Christ offers this propitiation to God, and assures us, that as certainly as the believer hath saving faith, so certainly shall he be justified. This plea our Lord makes good.

4. But is there nothing to be said against all this? are there no accusers? Yes, and therefore our advocate and intercessor stands up to oppose the adversaries in this court, and to answer all objections. Now, there are four that bring in their pleas against the justifying of the sinner: justice, the law, Satan, and conscience. But our advocate nonsuits all these.

(1.) Justice pleads against the poor sinner, and saith I am injured, and all the attributes of God are violated by this man's sinning—holiness opposed, faithfulness questioned, mercy abused, wisdom and omniscience are slighted, and omnipotence provoked; while justice stands engaged to be revenged on the transgressor. This is the flaming sword in the cherubim's hand, "turning every way to keep the way of the tree of life,"* so that the sinner cannot be pardoned and saved till that be removed: but Christ our advocate is fully equal to his office, by his blood he quencheth divine wrath, and so delivers the sinner from the wrath to come.† "God," saith the apostle, Rom. v. 8, 9, "commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were

* Gen. iii. 24.

† 1 Thess. i. 10.

yet sinners, Christ died for us : much more being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." "He drunk of the brook in the way, and so lift up his head." * This wrath is an insupportable burden, and would press the creature to the lowest hell ; but Christ hath borne it, and it was the heaviest burden in all his sufferings—this made him cry out, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death;" † and put him to a non-plus, "What shall I say? My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" ‡ Thus God's wrath lay hard upon him for our sakes, but he hath fully answered the demands of justice, and now pleads what he has done on the behalf of those that do retain him as their advocate, and he is able to answer even infinite justice itself.

(2.) A righteous law pleads against the sinner. "The law worketh wrath;" || it comes out thundering against the sinner, saying, he hath contradicted my just commands, and incurred the penalty of my threatenings, and the severest malediction ; it tells the sinner, with aggravating circumstances, all his offences of omission and commission, and fastens a curse upon him, saying, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." § Oh how formidable is this ! But behold suddenly after comes a relief by Christ, "who hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, for it is written, cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." ¶ "His own self bare our sins, in his own body on the tree." ** O bitter tree to Christ, O blessed tree to us ! Thus our intercessor stopped the mouth of the law, answered all its demands ; it cannot now pronounce

* Psalm cx. 7.

† Matt. xxvi. 38.

‡ John xii. 27. Matt. xxvii. 46.

|| Rom. iv. 15.

§ Gal. iii. 10.

¶ Gal. iii. 13.

** 1 Pet. ii. 24.

the final sentence of condemnation upon the true believer: he perfectly answered its demands by his active obedience, and satisfied for our breach of it by his passive obedience. That is an excellent text, Rom. viii. 3, 4, "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh," that is, through our inability to comply with it, "God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh," not that he was a sinner, but in the likeness of a sinner, "and for sin condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us," that is, as if we had personally obeyed it ourselves, "who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit," namely, who live with uprightness in the general course of our lives, notwithstanding our many slips and failings. But Jesus Christ doth cancel this bond of the law, as to the malediction, though not as to the obligation of it, to believers. And as to its condemning power, Christians may give that bold challenge, 1 Cor. xv. 55, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law: but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

(3.) The next accuser is Satan, who is called "the accuser of the brethren."* Sometimes he accuseth them to God, and oft to themselves. He is a subtle sophister that casts his fiery darts into our stubble souls, sometimes to kindle innate lust in our hearts into a flame, and then to terrify our consciences for sins committed. Sometimes Satan accuseth God to saints as formidable, and unapproachable, and unappeasable, otherwhiles he represents God to be all made up of mercy, to draw them either to despair or presumption. Often he accuseth poor sinning souls to God, as graceless and im-

* Rev. xii. 10.

penitent; but most usually he accuseth Christians to themselves as hopeless and irrecoverable. What shall a Christian do in all these difficult cases? He must have recourse to his advocate or intercessor, to rectify his mistakes, and nonsuit Satan. We have a notable text for this in Zech. iii. 1—4, in which observe,

[i.] Satan's action against Joshua the high priest, he stands at his right hand to resist him, that is, to be a Satan, an adversary to him.

[ii.] The ground of this accusation, "he was clothed with filthy garments," some guilt upon him, this gave the devil too much advantage for challenging him. But,

[iii.] Observe the angel of the Lord, Jesus Christ our advocate deals with him, first, By words, "the Lord rebuke thee," and by an excuse, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" As if he had said, Alas, he is but newly come from Babylon, and smells of the burning. Secondly, He confutes the devil by deeds, ordering his filthy garments to be taken from him, by remission of his sins; and then to be clothed with change of raiment, by putting on him the pure robe of Christ's perfect righteousness; and lastly, setting a fair mitre on his head, that he may boldly execute his priestly office.

And now, Satan, what hast thou to say against my servant Joshua? His pardon is thy confutation, thy bills of indictment are all answered; begone, thou infernal fiend, I have work for my servant to do, I have privileges to load him with. And thus doth our Lord take from Satan all the armour wherein he trusted—and thus he destroys the works of the devil—and thus the accuser of the brethren is cast down.* This doth our Lord for all his saints, and the like doth he against the devil's agents, wicked men, that are the saints' im-

* Luke xi. 22. 1 John iii. 8. Rev. xii. 10.

placable enemies : at present he will confound them, and at last “consume them with the spirit of his mouth and the brightness of his coming,” 2 Thess. ii. 8.

(4.) The last accuser is a man’s own guilty conscience. This is as a thousand witnesses—this is the bailiff to arrest him, the witness to accuse him, the under-judge to sentence him, the executioner to torment him—this, this is the poor sinner’s hell upon earth. O what nips and gripes hath the convinced sinner ! It makes him tremble with Cain, and endangers him to lay violent hands on himself with Judas ; for “a wounded spirit who can bear?”* Yea, the guilty sinner hath “a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.”† His guilt constantly attends him as an infernal fury, he can no more flee from it than from himself ; and if his “heart condemn him, God is greater than his heart, and knoweth all things.”‡ Well, but our Lord Jesus, the blessed Advocate, knows how to silence and to satisfy conscience, by his mediation and Spirit. The blood of Christ speaks better things to the conscience than the blood of Abel, Heb. xii. 24. The Apostle also says, Heb. ix. 14, “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” Nothing but a plaster made of the blood of Christ can pacify conscience ; and by this blood of Jesus we have boldness to enter into the holiest, Heb. x. 19, 22. Christ by his merit and intercession pacifies his Father, and then by the influences of his Spirit pacifies the conscience of the sinner ; when the sinner’s conscience is like the troubled raging sea, Christ saith, “Peace, be still ;” this only makes a calm within. Thus our Lord Jesus is an advocate to purify

* Prov. xviii. 14.

† Heb. x. 27.

‡ 1 John iii. 20.

and pacify conscience, and make a man become a real friend to himself.

Thus our Lord meets those accusations on the behalf of his client.

But, mistake not, these impleadings are for different reasons. 1. Christ doth not encounter justice as an adversary, but to make it friendly to us, which yet we must stand in awe of. 2. He meets not the charge of the law so as to supersede it from being the rule of our practice, but only to deliver us from the curse of it. 3. He so opposes Satan as not to hinder the poor Christian's fighting against him, but to furnish arms and arguments against him. 4. He so meets the accusations of conscience as not to rock us asleep in security, but to be the more watchful, and establish conscience upon a sure basis.

I might further add, that when our blessed advocate hath thus cleared the Christian's cause in the court, then he demands a final verdict, to show his client, and satisfy him that all things are fairly carried, and he is cleared from all charges laid against him; and this is by divine testimony in the holy scriptures to the sinner's conscience, saying plainly, "Be of good comfort, thy sins are forgiven thee," Matt. ix. 2. And now the soul can make that bold and brave challenge, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?" Rom. viii. 33, 34.

CHAP. V.

THE QUALIFICATIONS OF CHRIST AS OUR INTERCESSOR.

BEFORE we proceed to the reasons for Christ becoming Intercessor, I shall briefly review the properties and qualities of an advocate engaged to intercede, that we may see how Christ is sufficiently qualified for this office; and indeed he is beyond the rate of mortals accomplished for this occupation.

Now there are ten several qualifications of Christ that make him fit for this work.

1. He is intelligent. He is very able, judicious, and skilful for managing this important concern. A novice or an ignoramus is not fit for so high an employment; they would but bungle about it, and please no side. An attorney must exactly know the laws of the land, the mind of the lawgiver, the custom of the country, and circumstances of both parties. Such a one is our blessed Jesus, well accomplished for this high office and difficult service: Isa. xi. 2, 3, "The spirit of the Lord rests upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord,—and shall make him of quick understanding."* Christ is omniscient, and knoweth all things; he is well versed in the statutes of heaven, yea, acquainted with the decrees of God; for he was not only present in the grand transaction about recovering lost mankind, but sat at the council table, and interprets the divine will: "The only-begotten Son of God, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him," John i. 18. All things

* *Marg.* Scent or smell.

are delivered to him of the Father as his great plenipotentiary; he is the Judge's Son, and knows his Father's pleasure; yea, he is Judge in the King's Bench, and Master of Requests; he can help his clients in all their concerns in that court: yea, he knows the client's case and cause better than the client knows it himself. He knows what is in man, what he needs, what he would say; for "he that searcheth the heart knoweth what is in the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for his saints according to the will of God," Rom. viii. 27.

2. He is just, righteous, and impartial; not taking bribes to pervert judgment, nor favouring some that are not to be encouraged, and daunting others that have the better cause: "He shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of the ears;" he acts not by hearsay or specious pretences, "but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity, for the meek of the earth," Isa. xi. 3, 4. He will not be fee'd to embrace a bad cause; no, he is exact and punctual in his procedure; for as he is "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners"* in himself, so he is in all his pleas and actings, for he always did the things that pleased God. As for man, he challengeth his most carping adversaries, saying, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" Yea, "the prince of this world came, and had nothing in him."† His greatest enemies cleared him; yea, Pilate, that condemned him, said, "I find no fault in this man." "He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth."‡ Fear not mistaking or miscarrying, if Christ be your advocate; never did any to this day detect him of any flaw or fault in managing what he

* Heb. vii. 26.

† John viii. 46. xiv. 30.

‡ John xix. 4. 1 Pet. ii. 22.

undertook, for he never undertakes any but a righteous cause, and manageth it righteously—you may venture all in his hands.

3. He is condescending, he is of easy access, good to be spoken to. Though “he dwell on high, yet he humbleth himself to behold things in heaven and earth.”* Christ is God’s fellow, “thought it no robbery to be equal with God, yet took on him the form of a servant;”† and now he hears the requests of poor as well as rich, and espouseth the cause of the meanest peasant who is a humble client supplicating for grace and mercy. He despiseth not his prisoners that lie at his footstool; the lower they lie, the welcomer they are. Solomon’s mother bids him “plead the cause of the poor and needy;”‡ so doth our blessed Solomon effectually: “Though all kings fall down before him, yet he shall deliver the needy when he crieth, the poor also and him that hath no helper,” Psal. lxxii. 11—14. Since the world began it cannot be said that ever he rejected an upright suitor, for he hath said, and confirmed it many thousand times, “Those that come unto me, I will in no wise cast out.”|| It is very emphatical in the Greek,§ I will not, no, I will not reject either their persons or suits.

4. Another excellent qualification of this advocate is, that he is free, willing of his own accord to undertake any cause without any fee. You may have what you want of him “without money and without price.”¶ He prevents us with his “blessings of goodness;”** he begins his suit to us, and encourages us on, saying, “I counsel thee to buy of me gold.”†† He sells not law, but gives it, and it easeth his heart when he gets

* Psalm cxiii. 4—6. † Phil. ii. 6, 7. ‡ Prov. xxxi. 9.

|| John vi. 37. § 'Ου μὴ ἐκβαλῶ ἔξω.

¶ Isa. lv. 1.

** Psalm xxi. 3.

†† Rev. iii. 18.

custom of poor sinners. You must come to him *in formâ pauperis*, as poor beggars, and then you are most welcome: if you come to him begging, you will speed better than he that brings bags of gold and silver, I mean a conceit of their own merits. The poor publican that had but this word to say, "God be merciful to me a sinner," sped better than the proud Pharisee, that had so much to say for himself, how good he was, and what good he had done.* Our Lord doth all gratis, and looks upon it as a disparagement to his free grace to have his practice bought and sold, as if he were mercenary: there is his free Spirit, his free pardon, free access and acceptance—all is free.

5. He is ready, nigh at hand, within a call, he is not far to seek, when his client's necessitous case calls for his speedy help. You need not say, "Who shall ascend to heaven, to bring Christ down from above?"† He is not so included in those celestial mansions as to be excluded from his church on earth; for, saith he, "I am with you to the end of the world,"‡ He walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks;|| he is still within a call, "a present help in time of trouble."§ "The Lord was ready to save me,"¶ saith good Hezekiah. Daniel, Jonah, the three children, and all the saints in all ages and straits, have found him so; he is ever at God's right hand, listening what petitions you have to present to him, and there he is ready to present you to God as supplicants.

6. He is compassionate, very sympathizing with all his members, he is not accustomed to daunt or damp the courage of any of his poor clients, but to allure them with the sweetest attractions; "Come unto me

* Luke xviii. 13, 14.

† Matt. xxviii. 20

§ Psalm xlvi. 1.

† Rom. x. 6—8.

|| Rev. ii. 1.

¶ Isa. xxxviii. 20.

all ye that are weary and heavy laden ;” * and when they come he deals gently with them, he even carries the lambs in his arms, puts them into his bosom, embraces them, and gently leads them that are with young. † So true is what is said of our High Priest, Heb. v. 2, that he can have compassion on the ignorant, and them that are out of the way ; they cannot be more ready to confess sin, than he is ready to forgive ; his heart is still working for his sick and sorrowful church, and though he hath laid aside his feeling for himself, he still retains his fellow feeling, and can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, ‡ and cries, Oh ! in heaven, if his foot be trodden on upon earth ; hence it is that Christ pleads for his, not as a stranger, but as a kinsman, even as for himself with pathetic affection.

7. He is courageous and magnanimous, he dares encounter the most potent adversaries, none can daunt him, or put him out of countenance. If all the devils in hell come roaring against a feeble soul, the Captain of our salvation can encounter and will conquer them. Our David will overcome Goliath. He can silence the impertinent railings of reviling Rabshakehs, he hath conquered the proud Pharaohs, the Nimrods, Herods, and Antiochuses of the earth. Yea, he can quell the daring passions of a wicked heart, and the blasphemous objections foisted in, by the fiend of hell. Our advocate can even encounter and calm the thundering justice of an offended God, and pacify him towards the sinner, so God himself saith, Isa. xxvii. 4, 5, “Fury is not in me,” that is, causeless or implacable anger against my church, “who would set the briars and thorns against me in battle ?” as if he had said, there is no opposing me by force, but I will direct my people to a right

* Matt. xi. 28. † Isa. xl. 11. ‡ Heb. iv. 15. Acts ix. 5.

method for reconciliation, "let each take hold of my strength," that is Jesus Christ who is called the strength or power of God,* as when one lays hold of the lifted up arm and keeps it from striking, "and he shall make peace with me." O the prevalence of the Son of God in his undertakings! Well may he make that bold challenge, Isa. l. 7—9, "Who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near unto me; behold the Lord God will help me.—Our advocate always comes off conqueror.

8. He is faithful. It is true he is kind to his clients, yet he will not flatter them nor bear with their mistakes or miscarriages; our Lord will not deceive us by telling us our cause is good, when it is bad, no, he is distinguished for plain dealing. If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful,† he will be faithful to all his own, whatever becomes of hypocrites, and if his own miss it in any thing, he will rectify their mistakes. He informs us both of our state and cause. Thus he dealt faithfully with the seven churches of Asia,‡ he told them the best and worst of their case, he commends what is good, and condemns what is wrong in them, saying, "I have somewhat against thee." He is too just to undertake the patronage of a bad cause, or vindicate a hypocrite, but plainly exposes and utterly rejects them, as he did the Scribes and Pharisees. When men are not able to discover, he easily can. When the young gentleman, Matt. xix. 16—22, came in a good humour with that pertinent question, "Good master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" our Lord rectifies his mistake, and then discovers the unsoundness of his heart. He will by no means suffer his clients to go on under a mistake, but will

* 1 Cor. i. 24.

† 2 Tim. ii. 13.

‡ Rev. ii. and iii.

undeceive them. And this he declares before all the world, that men may know what to expect, and to put us upon inquiring both what we have to say, and to promote sincerity in all that draw nigh to him.

9. He is a constant intercessor and advocate. If he undertake the patronage of a person or cause, he will by no means desert them; all promises or threats of the adverse party can neither bribe nor deter him; no, nor can the unkindness or ingratitude of the client himself, alienate his affections, or so disoblige him as to remove them altogether: he may indeed withdraw for a small moment in a little wrath, but with everlasting kindness will he have mercy on them.* He may correct them sharply, but this is the fruit of his covenant love; in faithfulness he afflicts them, but will not cast off for ever; for having loved his own, he loves them to the end;† he saith it with five negatives in a breath, I will not, no, I will never, no never leave thee nor forsake thee, Heb. xiii. 5. Nay, he is constant in his intercession when we have intermissions in our prayers; he prayed for Peter when he was entering upon a temptation, and for his disciples when they were asleep. It would be a sad thing for us, if Christ were not more closely employed in his intercession, than we are in our prayers and devotions; he is constantly pleading; he ever lives to make intercession for us in the court of heaven:‡ he is still engaged.

10. He is prevalent and successful; he was never puzzled or baffled in any matter that ever he undertook to this hour, he hath always won the day and come off conqueror: even when Satan seemed to have the advantage in the desert, Matt. iv. how did the Son of God baffle him? He hath laid prostrate all his and our enemies; “Be of good cheer,” saith he, “I have

* Isa. liv. 7, 8. † Ps. cxix. 75. John xiii. 1. ‡ Heb. vii. 25.

overcome the world ;”* this he did mystically, as well as personally, yea for us and in us. He makes all his clients more than conquerors, even triumphers, always causing us to triumph in Christ our head.† Here is a blessed advocate indeed, that always bears away the laurel of victory ; if he speak *to man*, he speaks so as never man spake ;‡ if he speak *to God*, it is in this form, “ Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me, and I know that thou hearest me always,” John xi. 41, 42. The business is still carried forward on his side ; as soon as the motion is made, the request is granted ; let none of Christ’s clients fear miscarriage if you have him on your side as an advocate to plead for you, your success is certain.

CHAP. VI.

JESUS CHRIST THE ONLY INTERCESSOR BETWEEN GOD AND MAN.

It was proposed in the last place, in discussing the doctrinal part of the subject, to assign reasons why Christ and Christ alone, must be the intercessor for transgressors.

1. Because such is the vast distance and disproportion betwixt the infinite God and finite man, that there is no approaching to God without an intercessor. Man’s only happiness consists in union to, and communion with God : “ It is good for me to draw nigh to God,” saith David ; || indeed, our only happiness is bound up

* John xvi. 33.

† Rom. viii. 37. 2 Cor. ii 14.

‡ John vii. 46.

|| Psalm lxxiii. 28.

in conversing with God, Psalm lxxv. 4. But what intercourse can there be betwixt the infinite Majesty and finite man, without a middle person to interpose? Kings on earth take such state upon them that they are not approachable by ordinary subjects without a favourite: but vast is the distance betwixt God and man, as we are his creatures, worms at his footstool, but he is “the blessed and only Potentate, King of kings, and Lord of lords, who only hath immortality, dwelling in that light which no man can approach unto.”—1 Tim. vi. 15. The highest seraphim cover their faces, as not able to behold the glory of his Majesty.* O how much less is such a clod of earth able to draw nigh to him? But that is not all; man is a guilty sinner, a condemned malefactor before a sin-revenging judge, sitting on his throne. Our God is a consuming fire,† we are as dried stubble: and if they of Tyre and Sidon durst not come to Herod without making Blastus, the king’s chamberlain, their friend, ‡ surely there is no coming near God without our heavenly Blastus. Luther was wont to say that *Deus absolutus*, an absolute God, or a God out of Christ, is very formidable. God never conversed amicably with any creature since the fall, but through the Mediator.

2. Amongst the creatures intellectual and rational, there is none fit for this employment, to intercede betwixt God and man, or for man with God.

(1.) The elect angels cannot. It is true, they are holy, happy, near God, and ministering spirits under him, to convey his messages to the saints, and to convey their souls into Abraham’s bosom; but as there is not a word in scripture of their interceding for us, so it is an office above them, they died not for us, and

* Isa. vi. 2.

† Heb. xii. 29.

‡ Acts xii. 20.

have no merits of their own to shew for us, on our behalf, for their very standing is of grace.

(2.) As for the saints departed, they cannot make intercession for us, because they know not our particular states here upon earth, neither can they hear our requests, therefore if we should pray to them to pray for us, we should substitute them in the room of God, because we ascribe that to them which is proper for him, namely, the searching of hearts, and knowledge of what is done on earth, which are God's prerogatives.

(3.) As for saints here upon earth, they have warrant and command to pray one for another, but they can bring nothing of their own of suitable value to procure the granting of their requests, nor can they come in their own names, as deserving any such mercy either for themselves or others; but for the merits' sake of Christ only. So we may say with Eliphaz, Job v. 1, "Call now if there be any that will answer thee, and to which of the saints wilt thou turn?"

3. Another reason is, because Jesus Christ and he alone is qualified every way to make intercession. He is qualified by his divine and human nature hypostatically joined together in one person. "He is over all, God blessed for ever,"* God of God, equal with God, distinguished by personal properties, for he is "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person;"† so that he hath peculiar interest in and prevalence with the Father, being one with him,‡ not only in harmony and consent, but in nature and essence: and then his human nature was assumed on purpose, that he might sympathize with us, "and be a merciful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people," Heb. ii. 17. This is the first part of Christ's priestly office, in-

* Rom. ix. 5.

† Heb. i. 3.

‡ John x. 30.

tercession is the latter, wherein he shows the price he hath paid, and demands the fruit thereof for believers. None else were capable of being what our Lord was, and doing what he did.

4. Because Christ and Christ only comes under a sealed commission for this office. "No man taketh this honour to himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron," Heb. v. 4. God gives him a peculiar commission to be a priest, ver. 6. He hath a good warrant and an indisputable title to bear him out in all the parts of his office; yea, he was instituted in another manner than other priests, even by an oath*—an oath of fidelity betwixt Father and Son, which as it confirms it, so it adds to the formality of it. Where is the person that can show such a patent, under the broad seal of heaven, to be agent for Jehovah upon earth, and solicitor for the saints in heaven? He "hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man," John v. 27. And doubtless our dear Lord will be faithful in his office, much more than Moses as a servant; for Christ is a son over his own house, and therefore hath special care of it.†

5. Because there is a special union and relation betwixt Christ and believers. He is the head, they are his members‡—and it becomes the head to plead for the members. They are children, he is their elder brother||—it is requisite he should own them, and act for them that are helpless. They are his subjects, he is their king—they are his servants, and espouse his cause, and he espouseth theirs: he hath undertaken the patronage of all his saints, and their defence against all the enemies of their salvation. This interposition for them is not occasional or accidental, but purposely, as one part of his office, and they daily need his help.

* Heb. vii. 23, 21. † Heb. iii. 5, 6. ‡ Eph. iv. 15. || Gal. iii. 26.

6. Because God designs his saints for very high honour, namely, to be his special favourites.* Abraham was his friend: these only shall be familiar with him; he will communicate to them his secrets, which he will not do to others. "Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I do?"† One reason is, that Abraham may plead with God for Sodom and the safety of Lot. Thus the Lord made Moses, Elijah, Noah, Daniel, Samuel, and many others, his secretaries, and intercessors for others. "This honour have all his saints, to be a people near unto him."‡ And those that are preferred to be courtiers in the King of heaven's palace, must have one or other to bring them into favour, and help them out at a dead lift, for they are often put hard to it; as Moses, when God seems to rebuke him, and say, "Let me alone;"|| yet he would not, but goes on with his suit. And why so? Doubtless Moses knew he had a friend in the court that pleaded for him, and he found good success. Well, but by whose means are their prayers so prevalent? Surely not for their own worth or importunity, but for Christ's sake. So Daniel pleads, chap. ix. 17, "Cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake;" that is, Jehovah, or the blessed Jesus. And thus God hath honoured his saints to be prevailing intercessors through Christ both for themselves and others; and this hath been a credit to religion, and profit to many.

7. Yet once more; Christ is our intercessor that he may be honoured and rewarded for all his sufferings here on earth: so saith my text, Isa. liii. 12, "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death, and he was numbered

* John xv. 15.

† Gen. xviii. 17, 19.

‡ Psal. cxlviii. 14. cxlix. 9.

|| Exod. xxxii. 10.

with the transgressors, and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." This, with the first part of the verse, seems to be a recompense of Christ's humiliation, at least a consequence upon it; as if it had been said, It is most fit that he that interposed to die for believers on earth, should be exalted to God's right hand and intercede for them in heaven, and that authoritatively: Phil. ii. 6—11, which is a full comment on this text—"He humbled himself, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross: wherefore God hath highly exalted him—that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." God owns it as a debt due to Jesus, to be owned as Lord by all men, as the fruit of his sufferings and obedience. This Sun of righteousness was eclipsed, that he might shine with more resplendent glory in the heavenly horizon. It was always accounted an honour to be priest of the most high God; thus Melchizedeck was greater than the patriarch Abraham, for the blessing of him speaks so much; "and without contradiction the less is blessed of the better:"* Melchizedeck was higher than Aaron; but Christ is higher than both, as the apostle there proves. Our Lord is both king and priest, and is said to be a priest upon his throne; he therefore manageth this mediatorial office in a princely manner, commanding what is for the good of his church: "thus he bears the glory."† "For all power is given to him in heaven and earth."‡ And as God hath thus honoured, so doth he expect men should honour him in this high station, as our intercessor. But more of this hereafter.

* Heb. vii. 1—8. † Zech. vi. 12, 13. ‡ Matt. xxviii. 18.

CHAP. VII.

INFORMATION FURNISHED BY THE DOCTRINE WHICH HAS BEEN STATED AND CONFIRMED.

THE application of what has been advanced may be, first, by way of information in these four points concerning Jesus Christ.

1. This office of Christ as intercessor, hath been of ancient standing, from the beginning of the world, or at least from the fall of man; long before his incarnation, father Abraham saw his day; David in spirit calls him Lord;* yea, the whole ceremonial law represented Christ to the senses of the Jews: the high priest going into the holy of holies, and people standing without clearly represented this;† so our Lord Jesus was the true minister of the sanctuary of old, and now of the true tabernacle which the Lord hath pitched, not man, Heb. viii. 2, this is the holiest of all, ch. ix. 8. Signal and various were the appearances of Christ to the prophets and patriarchs in the Old Testament; every slain sacrifice spake Christ's death, and the sprinkling of blood, the sprinkling of conscience for remission of sins. "They did all eat the spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink, for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ," 1 Cor. x. 3, 4; not that the rock followed them, but the water out of the rock, and Jesus signified by that rock. Yea, how often did the blessed Jesus appear visibly as man to his saints of old, as a prelude of his incarnation; that man with whom Jacob wrestled, was the angel of the covenant, even God himself, therefore he calls the place Peniel, for saith he, "I have

* John viii. 56. Matt. xxii. 43.

† Luke i. 9, 10.

seen God and was preserved," Gen. xxxii. 24, 30. He had power with God.* And it was Jehovah that Abraham stood before, to plead for Sodom, Gen. xviii. 22. And all the saints in all ages of the world have had the same intercessor; so that it is not a new invention, though a gospel revelation, for they of old had the same essentials of religion without us, that is, without our gospel discoveries they could not be made perfect,† only ours is in a clearer character; so that Christ is always busy and never weary of his blessed work of intercession; it is no burden to him, though he hath been constantly employed from the beginning of the world to this day, and will be to the consummation of all things, as long as the meanest saint shall live upon earth; and when they are all gathered into heaven, he will deliver up his mediatorial kingdom to God the Father, and so God shall be all in all, 1 Cor. xv. 24, 28, in his essential kingdom as before the world began.

2. Christ's expiation and intercession are of equal extent. He intercedes for all for whom he satisfied justice, and none else. It is true, as was said before, the vine-dresser interposeth for sparing the vineyard one year longer, and Christ prayed for his enemies, "Father, forgive them;" but both were in order to their spiritual and eternal good: for repentance was intended in sparing, and included in forgiveness, for we cannot imagine that Jesus Christ should pray for pardon to the murdering Jews, continuing impenitent. He therefore prays for sinners in order to their conversion, but for converted souls, as before described. Divines tell us of a threefold love that God and Christ have towards man:—

(1.) A love of benevolence: so God hath no pleasure

* Hos. xii. 3—5.

† Heb. xi. 40.

in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should return and live.* And Christ saith of Jerusalem, “How often would I have gathered thee?”† Not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance,‡ which he expresseth many ways.

(2.) A love of beneficence, in doing good to all, and “his tender mercies being over all his works.”|| To the worst of men and heathens, “He left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave rain from heaven.”§ All partake of his general bounty.

(3.) There is a love of complacency and delight; this is what the Lord is pleased to manifest towards his saints, and chosen ones; this also is for Christ's sake, through his satisfaction and blessed intercession; of these it is said in Eph. i. 6, “Wherein he hath made us accepted, *εκαρίωσεν*, restored us to favour, in the Beloved.” These are the persons in whom the great and holy God takes pleasure above all persons and things in the world; they that are upright in heart are his delight, yea, the very prayer of the upright is his delight.¶ These are they for whom Christ hath laid down his life, and these are they whom he bears on his breastplate in the presence of Jehovah. There are some that are not for a universal intercession, while they favour a universal sacrifice or propitiation; because they cannot deny but many will perish for ever, which yet could not happen did Christ pray for them:** but they leave the death of Christ in the hand of man's free will, assisted only by general grace to make it effectual. We, however, believe that his sacrifice is as effectual as his intercession, and that he died for none but those for whom he prays, his in-

* Ezek. xviii. 23.

† Matt. xxiii. 37.

‡ 2 Pet. iii. 9.

|| Ps. cxlv. 9.

§ Acts xiv. 17.

¶ Prov. xi. 20. xv. 8.

** Caryl on Job xvi. 21. p. 393.

tercession being for the drawing out and bringing home the benefit of his sacrifice, to those and to all those for whom he offered himself to God. But I waive controversies.

3. If Christ be the only advocate and intercessor for his church and souls, then it is a great affront to the blessed Jesus to substitute any others in this office; it is arrogance intolerable to degrade the blessed Jesus, and ascribe this office to angels or saints departed. Alas, they know not our cares; the dead know not any thing; * “ Abraham is ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledgeth us not.” † Papists say, Yes: those heavenly inhabitants see all things in the world, *in speculo Trinitatis*, in the glass of the Trinity; but this would make them omniscient, and so gods. Now we read of some things that even angels themselves know nothing of, and that is of the day of judgment, the day and hour of it. ‡ Indeed, where do we find that ever God deputed angels or saints departed to hear people’s prayers, or to present them to God? No, they never did nor will arrogate this office to themselves. When John fell down before the feet of the angel, he was twice forbid and rebuked, with this reason, “ See thou do it not, for I am thy fellow-servant——worship God.” || And those glorious and glorified spirits give due deference to the mediator of the covenant in this weighty affair. None hath right by office to be advocate but Christ, none hath interest so prevalent in God as Christ, none hath merits to produce, none died for sinners but Christ. No, say Papists; none except Christ is the mediator of redemption, but saints departed are mediators of intercession: however, the Holy Ghost asserts that Christ sustains both characters

* Eccl. ix. 5.

† Matt. xxiv. 36.

‡ Isa. lxiii. 16.

|| Rev. xxii. 8, 9.

—1 Tim. ii. 5, 6, “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself for all.” Observe it, it is he only who gave himself for all, who intercedes for transgressors: nothing but Christ’s blood can plead for us.

O what horrid blasphemy in that mad prayer:—

By the blood of Thomas Becket,
Which he did spend,
Make us, O Christ, to climb
Where Thomas did ascend.

This needs no confutation; but were that perfidious traitor a holy martyr, it savours of horrid blasphemy, and is no other than the doctrine of demons, 1 Tim. iv. 1, as Mr. Joseph Mede fully proves in “The Idolatry of the Last Times.” Read him and Mr. Perkin’s “Reformed Catholic,” tom. 1. fol. 603; for I love not to rake in this puddle.

4. Then high is a believer’s privilege, if Christ be advocate and intercessor for transgressors. Penitent believing souls shall certainly speed in prayer, and come off well in whatsoever cause they engage. It is a comfort to us, to know that a godly friend prays for us. How was the Reverend Mr. Hildersham encouraged, when, being daunted in the first sermon he preached, the thought occurred to him, such a good man is praying for me? How much are God’s children quickened and comforted by the communion of saints? Even blessed Paul saith, Rom. i. 12, “That I may be comforted together with you, by the mutual faith both of you and me.” When a weaker Christian hears his particular case devoutly insisted upon by a stronger before the Lord, how doth it erect his hopes that God will hear? but much more when by faith he is persuaded Christ is pleading his cause. When the poor Christian can hardly get out a sensible word,

well, he thinks, but my advocate can make good sense of this sorry stammering, which I call praying: for our advocate takes it in good part, as a father doth the child's broken expressions, passes over weakness, spells out his meaning, and bids him welcome. Thus he dealt with Hezekiah, Isa. xxxviii. 14, "Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter, I did mourn sore as a dove:" but this confused lamentation was prevailing rhetoric in the ears of God. Christ his friend in heaven, and the Spirit working in the heart will prevail. He that hath given his Son for them, and his Spirit to them, how shall he not with them also freely give us all things? * Christians have a large charter—all things are theirs. † Whatsoever they ask they shall have; our Lord rather challengeth his disciples for asking too little, nay, nothing comparatively, rather than too much.—See John xvi. 23—27. O who would not be a serious Christian? Who would not seek for an interest in Jesus Christ? Nothing shall be left undone that may contribute to the Christian's happiness. If all the saints on earth, and all the angels in heaven interceded for you, it would not stand you in so much stead as Jesus singly, God's beloved Son; he owns you as his peculiar treasure, a people near unto him. ‡ Clear up your title to him, prepare your hearts for him, remember you are the favourites of the Saviour, open your mouth wide and he will fill it; || improve this liberty, enter into the King's palace, § come and welcome into the presence chamber, improve your interest in him, for your own souls, your relations, and the church of God; be not shy, let not Satan discourage you, or your unworthiness damp your spirits, but

* Rom. viii. 32.

† 1 Cor. iii. 21.

‡ John xv. 14. Psalm cxlviii. 14.

|| Psalm lxxxi. 10.

§ Psalm xlv. 15.

come boldly to the throne of grace, that you may obtain mercy, and find grace to help you in time of need. —Heb. iv. 15, 16.

CHAP. VIII.

THE SUBJECT APPLIED FOR THE CONVICTION OF CARELESS SINNERS.

THERE is reason for lamentation over poor graceless, Christless souls, who derive no saving benefit from Christ's intercession. Woe, ten thousand woes to that soul for which our Lord will not speak one good word ; though the eternal God comes against unbelievers as a roaring lion, and the wrath of this great King, the King of kings, is as messengers of death, yet our Lord Jesus will leave them to the smarting stroke of divine justice. That I may awake the poor sinner, consider,

1. Thou wast a transgressor from the womb, * estranged from God, going astray as soon as born, before thou couldst go, speaking lies, † before thou couldst speak, having a corrupt principle inclining to sin, and an imbecility to perform any good work, without strength ; ‡ yea thy carnal mind is enmity against God, || thy heart secretly rising against any thing that is truly good, and the better it is the more thou dislikest it, dead in trespasses and sins, without Christ : § this is thy case by nature, and dost thou expect Christ will intercede for thee ?

* Isa. xlviii. 8.

† Rom. v. 6.

§ Eph. ii. 2, 12.

† Psalm lviii. 3.

|| Rom. viii. 7.

2. Thou hast added thousands of actual sins to this thy original stock, and art daily increasing thy guilt, provoking God to wrath, so that innumerable evils do compass thee about, * stop the current of mercy, and may stop thy mouth in pleading for good. Any one of those sins is enough to ruin thy soul; but thou art one of those that provoke God to anger continually, yea, it is to be feared thou art provoking to anger the Angel of the covenant,† by thy unbelief and impenitency; how then canst thou think he will plead for thee?

3. Thou knowest that a real change doth always attend a relative change; thou canst not be in Christ except thou be a new creature:‡ thy old frame and new state can never accord: you must be created in Christ Jesus to good works.|| How can dead men perform acts of life? and how can dead works please the living God? No matter what thy professions or privileges are, all signify nothing without being a new creature; § and do you think Christ will patronize the devil's slaves?

4. Canst thou hide thy depraved heart under the colour of a flattering tongue? Cannot the heart-searching God quickly find out thy hypocrisy? Suppose thy conscience accuse thee on the approach of death, and thou begin to cry, Lord, Lord, have we not been so and so good? Have I not some oil in my lamp? Do I not sit among thy guests? When the King said, "Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having on a wedding garment? The man was speechless:" ¶ so wilt thou be.

5. Hast thou not reason to fear that our Lord Jesus will plead against thee, rather than for thee? and the

* Psalm xl. 12.

† Isa. lxxv. 3. Exod. xxiii. 21.

‡ 2 Cor. v. 17.

|| Eph. ii. 10.

§ Gal. vi. 15.

¶ Matt. vii. 22. Luke xiii. 26. Matt. xxv. 11. xxii. 11, 12.

wrath of the Lamb is a scorching wrath. A woe out of Christ's mouth is heavier than the woe of the law : it is the Mediator's vengeance, and this, as one saith, is double vengeance. When Christ himself, who pleads for his own, shall say, These sinners have pretended friendship, but have trampled my blood under their feet ; and shall say, bring these men out and slay them before me : how terrible the result ! *

6. Will not thy own conscience plead against thee ? Will not thy language be, Alas I was told of this day, ministers warned me, necessity urged, conscience sounded an alarm, I was summoned to worship the Father in spirit and in truth ; † I, however, took no notice but neglected duty or carelessly performed it ; I am convicted in mine own conscience, and cannot answer it ; and I am sure the judgment of God is according to truth, which accuseth me, and I am not able to answer it ; I cannot plead not guilty, there is a witness against me in mine own bosom ‡—what shall I say ?

7. Will you at last fly to the throne of grace erected in the gospel ? This indeed would now relieve, if you have recourse to it in due time and in due order ; but if you make a mockery of it, and come but by halves, and not in gospel sincerity or universality, this will not help you, or if you put it off till death summon you, it will be too late : make sure work here—think not to put it off till death. He that now offers life upon easy terms, and swears he wills not the death of a sinner, || will then swear in his wrath, that you shall not enter into his rest : § and men's fawning or howling can never reverse the sentence ; you must endure the torment.

* Heb. x. 29. Luke xix. 27.

† John iv. 24.

‡ Rom. ii. 15. || Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

§ Heb. iii. 18.

You will say, God forbid, I hope better things, I hope Christ will make intercession for me as well as other sinners, alas, I am a sinner as all others are; I know I cannot answer for myself, but I hope Christ will answer for me, I will believe right.

I answer, Thou mayest presume without any ground, and lull thyself asleep in that gospel cradle that was made for the ease of troubled consciences.

But let me ask thee,

(1.) What hath it cost thee to get possession of this hope? What despair hath preceded? Hast thou been kept prisoner under the law, shut up to this faith? * Hast thou ever seen thyself lost and condemned, without other relief except casting thyself into the arms of Christ, after much struggling? But if it be an easy indifferent faith, it is but a conceit of thine own head. Most men are not willing to take any pains to find out the state of their souls, but are content with a general notion that Christ is theirs, they are willing to believe it, and persuade themselves to believe it, without trial: this is a false faith and will deceive them.

(2.) It is true all men are sinners, but all are not unconverted sinners; sin hath not dominion over real saints, † they love it not, live not in it, hate it, fight against it. But alas, a carnal heart gathers encouragement to continue in sin, because grace abounds. ‡ At least this sort of reasoning serves to excuse some while sinning: because all are sinners, I am but like others, I cannot help it, let him that is without sin cast the first stone, I hope God will not be severe to mark it, because it is natural. But to a good heart these are rather aggravations of sin.

(3.) What haste do you make to get this matter well dispatched off your hands? The wise man gives good

* Gal. iii. 23.

† Rom. vi. 14.

‡ Rom. vi. 1.

counsel, Prov. vi. 1—5, “ Deliver thyself when thou art come into the hand of thy friend, go humble thyself, and make sure thy friend—give not sleep to thine eyes,” Oh, but how many nights do sinners sleep at uncertainties, and put off this great work of securing their interest in Christ, till it be too late ; they put off convictions, follow the world, find something else to do, and so lose their opportunity and their souls.

(4.) Most know not what a believing prayer means: “ Lord, have mercy upon me,” or “ God, forgive me my sins,” or some such short compliment must serve their turn ; they know nothing of wrestling with God, by secret groans, sighs, and tears, and exercising faith upon our blessed advocate that he may intercede for them. Most are too proud to humble themselves at God’s footstool ; the wicked, through the pride of his heart, will not seek after God.* Others slight it, and think it more ado than needs ; and say, “ What profit should we have if we pray unto him.”† They that come off with less, fare as well as those that make so much ado puling and whining.

Well, sirs, if this be your frame, you put Christ out of office ; as to yourselves, you think you need him not to stand your friend, you can shift well enough without him, else you would take more pains, and be more thoughtful to engage him to be on your side.

Ah poor graceless, Christless sinners, what will you do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation that shall come from far ? “ To whom will ye go for help, and where will ye leave your glory ? Without me, saith God, they shall bow down under the prisoners, and they shall fall under the slain.”—Isa. x. 3, 4. O, sirs, that will be an astonishing day, when the world shall be all in a flame, when the Judge shall descend

* Psalm x. 4.

† Job xxi. 15.

with a shout, shall call up all nations, proclaiming, "Arise ye dead and come to judgment," shall set the goats on the left hand, and the sheep on the right, and part them to heaven or hell, with "Come ye blessed," and "Go ye cursed," without delay or debate. Without this blessed advocate pleading for you, you must certainly be confounded; one word from your Judge will summon you, his omniscience will detect your deceit, his justice will sentence you according to desert, and his power will execute that sentence, and your torments shall continue to eternity! And who is able to alter or reverse that dreadful sentence? O poor sinner, think and think again, of that solemn day, and fly from the wrath to come; set thyself to task, examine thy conscience, study gospel terms, call thy sins to remembrance with grief, hatred, serious confession, and self-condemnation; post to the city of refuge, lay hold on the horns of the altar, give up thyself to the Lord. O that guilty malefactors condemned already by the gospel law, and leading to execution, would open their eyes, see their danger, and dread the consequences thereof! Think and think again, sinner, how many accusers thou wilt have at the great day—justice, Satan, law, conscience, will bring in large indictments; ministers, friends, creatures will be as so many witnesses, yea, the Lord Jesus Christ, whom thou now thinkest will plead for thee, will plead against thee; his incarnation, holy life, preaching, and miracles—his agonies, prayers, tears, condemnation, and crucifixion—his resurrection, ascension, session at God's right hand, and coming to judgment, will all with one consent bear their testimony against thee, and how wilt thou be able to answer all these? Will thy prayers, tears, good wishes, reformation, or alms-deeds, stand thee in stead to bring thee off? They are all ciphers, ex-

cept Christ, as the main figure, be set before them. Nothing will avail but Christ to intercede for thee. Consider what astonishment seized on Belshazzar, when he saw the hand-writing on the wall—"His countenance was changed, his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another."* Even so will it be with thee, when this writing is read: "TEKEL," that is, "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting: MENE, thy days are numbered: PERES, thy soul must be divided from thy body, and both from God." O dreadful day! Tremble, O tremble now, to think of it! The day of grace is past, the Spirit will strive with you no longer, heaven is shut upon you, hell is open to receive you, justice orders an arrest for you—all the world cannot secure you. Who can be bail for you? as Eli said to his wicked sons, 1 Sam. ii. 25, "If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?" as if he had said, If only man be wronged, man can right it, and reconcile the persons; but if the offence be against the supreme Judge, what man will dare to interpose as moderator, or who shall make himself a judge for him? No, no, that work has ceased for ever: none but he that is equal with God can be a prevailing advocate. See to this as you love your immortal souls.

* Daniel v. 5, 6.

CHAP. IX.

EXAMINATION PROPOSED TO ASCERTAIN WHETHER JESUS CHRIST BE OUR INTERCESSOR.

IT is a case of conscience of great importance, to know whether we have an interest in Christ, as our advocate, to intercede for us ; for unless Christ plead for us, neither our persons nor our performances can be accepted now, nor will he plead for us at the last day before the great tribunal ; and then we are cast and lost for ever.

In resolving this weighty case, I shall propose to you these ten questions :—

1. Hath the Spirit of Christ pleaded and prevailed with you ? If hitherto you have stood out against the gracious pleadings of the Holy Ghost with your souls, to convince and convert your hearts, do not imagine Christ will plead for you ; for these run parallel, and answer each other. Christ will not own you as brethren, except you be God's sons by regeneration ; you must be members of his body, otherwise he will not own you. He prays not for the world, but for those that God hath given him by conversion.* The Spirit of God conquers those for whom Christ intercedes. Sin hath alienated us from God—grace unites us to him. The poor blind man could say, “ Now we know that God heareth not sinners,” John ix. 31. The loudest vociferations of unconverted souls, he regards no more than the howling of a dog, or the roaring of a bear.† They scorned him, and he slights them ; so he saith, Prov. i. 24, 28, “ Because I have called and ye refused, then they shall call upon me, but I will not answer ; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me.”

* John xvii. 9.

† Amos viii. 3.

This is a *lex talionis*, a just requital. Souls without sincerity are none of the favourites of heaven; you must yield yourselves to God, or think not he will condescend to you. He hath sent his Spirit in his word to treat with sinners, and this is, τὸ παράκλητος, the intercessor for God, as Christ is our intercessor with God; and the Spirit's plea is, to "convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment," John xvi. 7—11. Have your souls been thoroughly convinced of your being under the power of unbelief, whatever your pretences have been to faith, and that you must have a righteousness better than your own, even Christ's, or you are undone and condemned for ever? Deal faithfully with God and your own consciences. Hath the Spirit of God, by conviction, taken you off all false bottoms? hath it dismounted you from your conceits and vain imaginations, levelling every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ?*

2. Are you the persons that plead against themselves? Christ will be advocate for him that doth most censure, accuse, and condemn himself at God's bar: so the text, 1 Cor. xi. 31, "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." This would put the devil out of employment, and God himself in kindness would not charge the sinner with that with which he hath charged himself. Conscience is as a thousand witnesses; it first arrests and impeacheth him before God's tribunal, produceth more against himself than all the world can accuse him of or knows of, in consequence of which he applies the threatening to himself; he saith, I am guilty, and obnoxious to God's wrath, I am silenced, and have not one word to say for myself

* 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

why sentence should not be executed: the Lord is righteous if he cast me into hell this instant; my mouth is stopped, and I am become guilty before God.* Now doth the blessed Jesus interpose and plead for the poor sinner, and this is of divine appointment, in compliance with the order, "Deliver him from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom."† You will say, how is this consistent with 1 John iii. 20, "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things:" so that it should seem the supreme Judge will much more condemn us? I answer, this text speaks of a passive condemnation by an accusing conscience, when men stifle it, and do what they can to avoid or evade its censures, which was the case of Cain, Saul, and Felix, that found out diversions, and were loth to attend or yield to its remonstrances; but when a man is active in self-condemnation and joins with it, when he takes the part of God and conscience against himself, this is a great duty and good property, and God will take such a soul's part, and our Lord Jesus will intercede for it. What sayest thou, soul? dost thou voluntarily arraign thyself, hold up thy guilty hand, ingenuously confess thy sins, own hell torments as the proper fruit thereof? Canst thou find nothing good in thyself for which God may acquit thee, and wilt thou justify God if he condemn thee? Then thou art the person of whom Jesus Christ will undertake the patronage. But if thou justify thyself as the Pharisee, saying, God, I thank thee I am not so bad, or so great a sinner as others; then saith our Lord, Plead for thyself, and bring thyself off if thou canst: here is a poor self-condemning Publican standing afar off, not daring to lift up his eyes to heaven, crying out, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"‡ This is the man

* Rom. iii. 19.

† Job xxxiii. 24.

‡ Luke xviii. 13.

that I will plead for and justify, not the other. See the difference of these.

3. Art thou laid under the sense of thy wants and great exigencies? "The whole need not the physician, but they that are sick."* They that are *recti in curia*, right in God's court, need not an advocate. This follows on the former; due sensibleness is the fruit of conviction; and indeed "the Son of man is come to seek that which is lost."† All are lost, but he finds none savingly except those that feel themselves in a lost condition. The poor sinner saith, with David, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep;"‡ then Christ will seek and save him. And indeed none will seek for a surety but the debtor—none desires or much cares for an advocate but he that is a necessitous client—none stands upon relief but the beggar. Let a Laodicean professor come in, he will say, "I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing;" || nay, then, saith Christ, here is no work for me, shift for thyself. O, but saith the soul that is poor in spirit, and seeth himself in a forlorn state—woe is me, I am the chief of sinners, the least of all saints, if a saint, an ignorant, impotent, vile wretch: how am I estranged from God? how long have I been the devil's vassal? My fear is, that I am in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity; other lords have had dominion over me: § I see nothing but bare walls about me; help I must have: whither shall I go? to whom shall I flee? Where is the advocate that will undertake my desperate cause? that hath interest in the Judge, and may bring me off clear who am a condemned malefactor? Is there any to be found that can draw up a petition to the Judge for my life, for the life of my

* Matt. ix. 12.

† Matt. xviii. 11.

‡ Ps. cxix. 176.

|| Rev. iii. 17,

§ Acts viii. 23. Isa. xxvi. 13.

soul? "Men and brethren, what shall I do?"* are there any hopes? "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"† Eternal salvation is now the great concern, all other things are but trifles. It is to such sensible souls as these that our Lord reveals himself to bring them off.

4. Hast thou regarded Christ and studied his mediatorial office? Christ will not lead sinners blindfold into this privilege: as they know their danger, so he will make them know their remedy. Indeed, Christ crucified is the chief object of the Christian's knowledge: "I determined," saith Paul, "not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified:"‡ and again, "That I may know him and the power of his resurrection."|| Yea, it becomes the Christian also to regard Christ at the right hand of God, and his employment there. § But observe it, it is not enough to know these things notionally, but they should also be known experimentally and practically, so as to be transformed into the very nature and image of Christ, to be buried with him by baptism into death, to rise with him, and walk in newness of life: being dead unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord:¶ so to rise with him, as in some sense to sit with him in heavenly places,** not only as he represents us, but as our hearts are with him, "seeking the things that are above," our affections there, our desires and delights above.†† Our Lord bears none upon his breastplate in the holy of holies, but such as are united to him, and conformed in their measure to his mediatorial undertaking, for he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit,‡‡ that is, he is naturally one with him in love, and spiritually one by faith, as

* Acts ii. 37.

|| Phil. iii. 10.

** Eph. ii. 5, 6.

† Acts xvi. 30.

§ Col. iii. 1.

†† Col. iii. 1, 2.

‡ 1 Cor. ii. 2.

¶ Rom. vi. 4—11.

‡‡ 1 Cor. vi. 17.

Christ dwells in his heart by faith ; * hence, saith the apostle, Gal. ii. 20, “ I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me.” Conformity to Christ is an inseparable attendant of relation to Christ ; for this is a certain rule, whosoever hath a true interest in one of Christ’s offices, purchases, or undertakings, hath also a title to, and benefit from all : for God will not parcel out his Son’s merits or undertakings as men do in selling their commodities in shops, that measure out as much as suits the customer’s turn, and leave the rest—nothing in our Lord is such refuse commodity. You must have all or none, and what comes not within the reach of experimental feeling, may be gathered from what a Christian feels sensibly in his own soul : for example—he that feels the fruit of Christ’s office, as Prophet and King, may conclude he is also his Priest, that he died for him on the cross, and intercedes for him in heaven ; when the soul is savingly illuminated, sin mortified, the heart quickened, then you may conclude that Jesus Christ is improving his sacerdotal office for you, in his intercession at God’s right hand ; for our Lord saith to Peter, “ If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.” † Mind this, look at what you feel in your own hearts, if you would know what Christ doth for you in heaven.

5. Hast thou retained Christ as thy advocate ? No counsellor can justly plead the client’s cause, except he be retained and have fees. It is true, Christ takes no fees yet faith retains him, and he will not plead your cause except you act faith upon him ; it is by faith that the king is held in the galleries ; ‡ sincere faith appropriates Christ, it takes him aside and engageth him to be a friend ; “ My beloved is mine,” saith the believer, “ and I am his ;” || I will not go to God without him, yea,

* Eph. iii. 17. † John xiii. 8. ‡ Cant. vii. 5. || Cant. vi. 3.

if I have him, I have God ; “ My Lord and my God,” he loved me and gave himself for me ;* I would not for a world be without a title to Christ, I must have him or I am undone ; “ what things were gain to me, those I count loss for Christ ;”† O that I may be found in him as the poor client in his advocate ! Alas, I am only as a briar and cannot stand before the consuming fire of divine justice, but I am resolved to take hold of thy strength, that I may make peace with thee, Isa. xxvii. 4, 5. O for a well-grounded faith ; “ Lord, increase my faith ; help my unbelief ;”‡ if I had but faith as a grain of mustard-seed, I should remove mountains ; however, I will reach after my dear Lord, I will follow after, “ if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus ;”§ I will pursue apace, and when I have got hold of him, I will hold him fast, and not let him go, until I have brought him into my mother’s house, that others may be delighted with him as well as I.¶ Lord, thou hast said, that those that come to thee, thou wilt in no wise cast out ;¶ I come to thee, draw me, draw me with cords of love ; surely thou dost not use to reject clients, Jesus Christ makes intercession for all that come to him :** I am not worthy to be received, but I have thy promise to accept me, which is thy bond, and I will sue it while I retain mine advocate, and renounce all others ; I hope it is not groundless presumption, for thou didst at last accept and commend that woman’s faith, who resolutely followed thee, though she had no command, promise, or example in particular, yea, she had some checks, yet depending on thy compassionate nature, thou didst graciously own and commend her, Matt.

* John xx. 28. Gal. ii. 20.

† Phil. iii. 7, 8.

‡ Luke xvii. 5. Mark ix. 24.

§ Phil. iii. 12.

¶ Cant. iii. 4.

¶ John vi. 37.

** Heb. vii. 25.

xv. 21—28. Lord, it is thine office and proper work to be thus employed, and I will retain thee.

6. Doth the Spirit of grace make intercession within you? This is a great truth that Christ makes intercession for none in heaven, but those that pray by the assistance of the Spirit. These always go together, Rom. viii. 26. 27, "Likewise also the Spirit helpeth our infirmities,—it maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered: and he that searcheth the heart knoweth what is in the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." Christ at God's right hand, and the Spirit in the hearts of believers, have the same object in view. It is not the gift of prayer, but the grace of prayer, that God takes notice of; it is not our own spirit, but the Spirit of God, which is the Spirit of adoption, crying, Abba, Father,* and this is the Spirit of his Son, namely, Christ, he knows and owns the least whisper of his Spirit working in his children's hearts, and will echo to it above. None can rationally expect that our Lord should plead for such as plead not for themselves; nor is it any kind of pleading that is owned, but praying in the Holy Ghost,† depending upon and feeling his enlivening influences. The body of the sun is in heaven, its beams dart upon earth, and draw up sap into trees from the roots, and make the earth fruitful: the person of Christ is in heaven, but his Spirit is in the hearts of believers, actuating their faculties, and drawing up their hearts to God in duty. O what strong and powerful reflections God-wards doth the Christian feel! he is often beyond nature, and above himself, in a transport of grief, desire, joy, and delight in God; whence comes this? surely not from any power the

* Rom. viii. 15. Gal. iv. 6.

† Jude, 20.

Christian can exert of himself; the third person of the Trinity is at work within, as the second is at work above, carrying on the same design. It is true, sometimes the exercise of grace may be intermitted, and the Spirit's assistance suspended when Christ is employed for the gracious soul; but there is the habit of grace, where the Spirit assists and Christ intercedes for men. Dost thou then pour out thy heart like water before the face of the Lord?* dost thou groan and bewail with bitter lamentations for sin, with earnest supplications for mercy? is thy heart lifted up in thankful acknowledgments of mercy? Jacob had power over the angel, and prevailed.† How was that? the text saith he wept and made supplication, yea, he wrestled and in a sort wrested a blessing out of his hands.‡ Almighty God suffers himself to be overcome by weak and sinful creatures, this comes to pass by the Holy Ghost joining with believers in their prayers, and the Lord Jesus in heaven pleading their cause, by which they become prevalent, and have power with God. If the fire of God be on the altar of the heart, the smoke of this incense comes with the prayers of the saints, and ascends up before God out of the angel's hand.|| If thy heart be carried out to God, then thou art upon Christ's heart. Our Aaron bears the names of the children of Israel upon the breastplate of judgment, when he goeth into the holy place, for a memorial before the Lord continually.§

7. Dost thou regulate thy prayers and conduct according to the will of God? Do not think that Jesus Christ will patronize thy petitions if thou counteract his pleasure; if thou study the precepts thou mayest plead the promises. The love of any sin spoils the

* Lamb. ii. 19.

† Hos. xii. 3, 4.

‡ Gen. xxxii. 24.

|| Rev. viii. 3, 4.

§ Exod. xxviii. 29.

fruit of our prayers. If you regard iniquity in your hearts, God will not hear your prayers.* Disown sin or he will disclaim you. "God heareth not sinners, but if any man be a worshipper of God and doth his will, him he heareth."† Not that you can expect to be sinless, but sincere haters of sin, fighters against it, that it may not have dominion over you. More particularly, your prayers must be regulated according to the will of God for matter, manner and end; "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, to consume it upon your lusts."‡ The Pharisees prayed to be seen of men, they had their reward; it was a poor reward to be applauded as saints, when they were arrant hypocrites.¶ Besides, you must bottom your prayers on scripture precept, promise, or precedent; for if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us, and then we know we have the petitions we desired of him, 1 John v. 14, 15, that is, we may be assured our petitions are filled up in heaven, and shall be granted in God's due time, for which it becomes us to wait; for God's preceptive will is the rule of our petitions, his disposing will is the rule of our submission. He bids us pray, "Thy will be done,"§ and Christ himself saith, "Not as I will but as thou wilt."¶ It becomes not beggars to be choosers, but we should refer ourselves to God, and say, the will of the Lord be done, God is wiser than I am to know what is good for me, and when is the fittest season to bestow mercy. If thy will be melted into God's will, thou mayest pray with Luther, *fiat voluntas mea quia tua*, let my will be alone mine, because it is thine, there shall not be two wills betwixt us, I freely resign up my will to thee. Then you may be assured Jesus Christ takes

* Psal. lxvi. 18.

† John ix. 31.

‡ James iv. 3.

¶ Matt. vi. 5.

§ Matt. vi. 10.

¶ Matt. xxvi 39.

your cause in hand, and it shall succeed—see to this in a special manner: for if you contradict his will, you invalidate Christ's intercession as far as it respects yourself, for Christ doth nothing but what is according to his Father's commandment.*

8. Art thou an advocate for God, and the interests of Christ? All the saints are Jerubbaals, pleaders against sin and idolatry.† True Christians must earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints;‡ they must not be neuters or ambodexters; if you expect Christ should take your part, you must take his. When the question is asked, "Who is on the Lord's side?" do you as the sons of Levi, "gather yourselves unto the Lord?"|| do you separate yourselves from sin and sinners, as David, who could say, "I have not sat with vain persons—I will not sit with the wicked;"§ God forbid I should be confederate with God's enemies? Nay, do you resolve by God's grace to resist unto blood, striving against sin?¶ do you contend hard for precious truths, pure ordinances, and practical godliness, wherein the glory of God and welfare of souls are nearly concerned? In indifferent things Paul will become all things to all men, but to false brethren in weighty cases, he saith, Gal. ii. 5, "To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you." The pious soul is peremptory for God, will not yield a hair, nor leave a hoof behind, where the essence of religion is concerned, and the honour of God. This is indeed a Shibboleth, it may come to this, that you must either sin or suffer; and if you confess him before men, it is as certain that he will confess you before his Father, otherwise he will

* John x. 18.

† Judges, vi. 32.

‡ Jude, 3.

|| Exod. xxxii. 26.

§ Psal. xxvi. 4, 5.

¶ Heb. xii. 4.

not, Matt. x. 32, 33. Do you sympathize with Christ and his members? Doth the care of all the churches lie upon you? * Are you like minded with the saints, naturally caring for the good of souls? † Do you prefer Jerusalem above your chief joy? Do you pray for the peace of Jerusalem? Are you the Lord's remembrancers to give him no rest, till he establish his Jerusalem a praise in the earth? ‡ If you will not plead Christ's cause, how can you expect he will plead yours? Hath not Christ deserved that you should speak a good word for him? not accidentally or by the by, but purposely, and expressly; the Psalmist saith, "Prayer also shall be made for him," || that is, not for Christ personal, but for Christ mystical, his church, cause or interests. You are no real member of Christ, unless you duly regard his cause; your own concerns will be swallowed up in his; but if you mind your own things, and not the things of Christ; § if you mind your trades, profits, preferments, and matter not whether religion sink or swim, our Lord will leave you out of his prayers. If men be careless of Christ, he will be as regardless of them, for truth hath said it, "Them that honour me, I will honour; but they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed. ¶"

9. What experience have you had of returns to your prayers? God never answers prayers, but on the account of his Son's intercession. Now if you have truly found that the Lord hath given a gracious answer to your prayers, you may infer your interest in Christ.

Ques. But how may a Christian know that his prayers are answered in mercy?

* 2 Cor. xi. 28.

† Psal. cxxxvii. 6. cxxii. 6. Isa. lxii. 6, 7.

§ Phil. ii. 21.

+ Phil. ii. 20.

|| Psal. lxxii. 15.

¶ 1 Sam. ii. 30.

Ans. If thy heart be prepared or established, God then causeth his ear to hear.* When the soul takes more delight in God himself, than in the mercy solicited. When the soul is eased of its burden, on pouring out its complaint before God.† When the mercy is brought to our hands through insuperable difficulties, as in Abraham's having a son.‡ When God facilitates the producing of the mercy, as in Israel's deliverance out of Egypt.§ When God dips the mercy in covenant love. When God is seen in the mount of extremity.¶ When the mercy prayed for and obtained, leaves the soul in a more humble, fruitful, thankful frame. When a holy flame of love and zeal descends from the altar to the hearth of the heart,¶ and many more evidences, experienced by the gracious soul, which cannot be here recited. And indeed I dare appeal to the praying saint, whether he have not found some satisfying testimonies coming along with the mercy prayed for, whereby he may perceive it comes in mercy, from peculiar love, either from the soul's qualification for it, the means and manner of its coming, the season and circumstances attending it, together with the effects and consequences thereof; all which will demonstrate this truth, that some mercies come in answer to prayer. And what then? was it the goodness of the prayer absolutely considered, that obtained the mercy? No such thing, it was only Christ as the meritorious and efficient cause, by the Spirit's assisting the Christian in prayer, as the means and condition of audience of prayer: so that the whole praise is due to Christ, to God in Christ, as the object and author, and mediator, procuring these good things for us. What workings

* Psal. x. 17. xxxvii. 4.

† 1 Sam. i. 18.

‡ Rom. iv. 17.

§ Exod. ii. 23. xi. 3.

¶ Psal. lxxxvi. 17. Gen. xxii. 14.

¶ 1 Chron. xxi. 23.

of heart have you in endearedness of soul to him? Can you truly pronounce that sweet doxology, Eph. i. 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings, in heavenlies, ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις, in Christ;" that is, places or things, more properly. Are your hearts more endeared to Christ for every mercy you receive from God, as being the fruit either of Christ's purchase or intercession?

10. Hath the grace of God kept thee humble and vile in thine own eyes? You will never prize Christ, till you despise yourselves: our Lord will not be all in all with you, till you be nothing at all in your own eyes: you must go out of yourselves in every performance, or you will not appear in Christ. That is a notable character of a thorough-paced Christian, Phil. iii. 3, "For we are the circumcision," there is heart sanctification—"which worship God in the spirit," there is scriptural adoration—"and rejoice in Christ Jesus," there is well-grounded exultation—"and have no confidence in the flesh," there is the bottom and top grace of self-denial. Indeed, let a Christian's accomplishments be angelical, his enlargements seraphical, his obedience exact and universal, yet he mars all if he boast of them, trust to them, and do not go out of himself to Christ for justification and acceptance: our Lord will say of such a one, he is resolved to stand upon his own bottom, he needs none of my satisfaction or intercession, see what he will make of it, his best righteousness is but finite, and will not answer the demands of infinite justice. Surely the self-condemning publican will speed better than the vapouring Pharisee: he that is of least account in his own eyes, is of highest account in God's. The apostle Paul knew how to stand upon his punctilios whilst he was a Pharisee, and was ready

to say with the proud papist—*cælum gratis non accipiam*, I will not have pardon and heaven at free cost, I will give my merits, my penny shall be in exchange as a valuable consideration for what I expect from God, or else I will have none of it; nay, I can do more than God requires, and have some works of supererogation to spare for others that are defective. Well, thou proud beggar, thou needest none of my alms, go to another door, thou shalt go without from me: I will reserve my gifts for them that are poor in spirit, and will be beholden to me. But Saul became another man, when divested by conviction and conversion of all his towering imaginations, and made a Paul, that is, little in his own eyes; yea, nothing at all, though not behind the chief apostles: yea, less than the least of all saints, the chief of sinners: yea, he even at present accounts his best accomplishments and attainments but as dung and dross.* Yet mistake not, as though graces and duties, issuing from the Spirit of God, and practised by the believer in the state of grace, are such contemptible things in the eyes of either God or man; but if set in Christ's room, they are put out of their place, and to be disowned. Alas, saith the believing soul, what are my best duties without Christ, but as a cipher without a figure, a body without a soul, a sacrifice without fire? I despair of access to God, or acceptance with God without Christ: he hath said it, and I feel it, "without me you can do nothing:" and I am only accepted in the beloved: in myself I am as an unclean thing, and all my righteousnesses are as filthy rags: God may justly cast me off, and spread dung upon my face, even the dung of my solemn feasts.† When I have even fasted, prayed, obeyed,

* 2 Cor. xii. 11. Eph. iii. 8. 1 Tim. i. 15. Phil. iii. 8.

† John xv. 5. Eph. i. 6. Isa. lxiv. 6. Mal. ii. 3.

and done my best in acts of religion ; yet my Lord hath taught me, and I see need to comply, “when you shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants.”—Luke xvii. 10. Our best works are not available to justification, nor to take off the guilt of one sin : my only confidence is in Christ, his merits and atonement must satisfy for my guilt, his intercession must make way for my approach to God : in this new and living way must I draw nigh to him. O for a true heart, and full assurance of faith. *

CHAP. X.

DIRECTIONS OF A GENERAL NATURE RELATIVE TO THE INTERCESSION OF CHRIST.

THESE directions are, in the first place, intended to urge careless sinners to look after a saving interest in Jesus Christ, that their guilty souls may have some protection from the flaming sword of justice.

Secondly, To instruct pious persons—

1. In what cases we must employ our advocate.
2. How we must conduct ourselves under this glorious privilege.

I. This is a certain and solemn truth, that some souls are without Christ, † that is, without a saving interest in him. Ah poor sinners, how can you live, how dare you die, and how think you to appear before the tremendous tribunal at the great day without an advocate? Can you defend your conduct? No, no,

* Heb. x. 20, 22.

† Eph. ii. 12.

how can man be just with God? If he contend with you, you cannot answer for one of a thousand.* He is too wise to be deceived by cunning hypocrites, he is too strong to be conquered by the world's daring champions. Either you must take this Benjamin along with you, or you cannot see your sovereign's face with comfort. What shall I say? What words shall I use to persuade you to accept of Christ as your advocate? I have discovered your dangerous state in what has been advanced; loth I am to leave you in this naked, condemned state: how can you escape if you neglect so great salvation?† I beseech you in the bowels of Christ, as you love your own souls, and would come off at the great day with comfort, look after a title to this blessed advocate.

I shall urge, first, some arguments; and secondly, give some directions in this case.

1. Consider that not one drop of saving mercy can descend to your souls but through Christ; you are ready to cry, Mercy, good Lord, mercy—that is the thing you want, but as Jehu said to Ahab, “What hast thou to do with peace?”‡ So, poor sinner, what hast thou to do with mercy till thou be engrafted in Christ, through whom all saving mercy flows? God will not cast a propitious eye upon thee, but through a mediator. It is very observable in the time of the law, that,

(1.) None might come into the holy of holies, where the mercy-seat stood, but the high priest, which signifies, we have nothing to do with mercy but through Christ our High Priest.

(2.) The high priest must not come near the mercy-seat without blood, || to show that we have no right to

* Job ix. 2—4.

‡ 2 Kings ix. 18.

† Heb. ii. 3.

|| Lev. xvi. 14.

mercy but through the expiatory sacrifice of Christ's blood.

(3.) The high priest might not upon pain of death, come near the mercy-seat without incense ; * for there is no mercy to be expected from God without the incense of Christ's intercession ; mercy swims to us only through the blood of Christ. You may cry, and crave, and be loudly importunate for mercy, but you will be nonsuited unless you have a title to Christ. Consider this, sinner, and haste to the city of refuge, lest the avenger of blood overtake you.

2. You are in daily need of supplies of mercy, you cannot live a moment without some help from heaven. " In God we live, move, and have our being : " † we need common mercies, meat to nourish us, clothes to keep us warm, beds for lodging, houses to shelter us from the heat of summer and the cold of winter ; we need seasonable weather for seed-time and harvest : and we are daily forfeiting these mercies into the hands of justice, yea, and our lives also. It is worth observing, that when Noah had offered his sacrifice, and God is said to smell a sweet savour, that is, only through Christ the mediator ; it is added, " I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake : " he also promiseth seed-time and harvest.—Gen. viii. 21, 22. Alas, sirs, without Christ your very blessings are cursed ; ‡ though they be materially blessings, yet they are formally and eventually curses, unless perfumed with Christ's intercession : the curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked, let it be never so sumptuously furnished. || Nay, you are indebted to Christ's intercession (in some sort) for the sparing of your lives, else you had been in hell before this day, but this is

* Lev. xvi. 13.

† Mal. ii. 2.

† Acts xvii. 28.

|| Prov. iii. 33.

only common intercession for the worst who remain on probation, and will not hold long.

3. Consider therefore, you have a time, and but a time, to get an interest in this blessed Jesus to intercede for you: when your short life is expired, and your advocate is to seek, you are lost for ever. Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.* The great assizes hasten apace—as yet you may find an advocate—tarry till your breath be stopped, and your state is hopeless: he that you may now have for your advocate, will then be your Judge, and will be inexorable. Now bestir yourselves, set matters straight before you, come into the court, get hold of Christ: you may have him, you must have him, or you will be undoubtedly cast, condemned, and executed. Oh remember the foolish virgins that went too late to seek for oil, and found the door shut; after all their crying, “Lord, Lord, open to us,”† they found no entrance, because they had missed the right door, Jesus Christ the true door of the sheep.‡ Get in at this door, or you will be shut out for ever.

4. You will be every day less and less capable of looking after this intercessor. You think a few words at last must needs oblige him to interpose for you; if you have but time to say, “Lord, be merciful to me for Christ’s sake,” you conceit such a compliment will then charm him to be your friend. Alas, by your sinning you daily harden your own hearts, set God at a further distance from you, increase your guilt and provoke God against you. || He may now say, go to the gods whom you have served—what right have you to call upon me? Have you gratified Satan all your days, and do you think to take sanctuary under my wing

* 2 Cor. vi. 2.

† Matt. xxv. 10, 12.

‡ John x. 7.

|| Heb. iii. 13.

now in a storm? Getting a title to this blessed advocate, is not with a word by the way, it will cost you hard tugging to obtain this privilege. Look to yourselves, get this highly important affair adjusted in God's way and time, or take your leave of it for ever. Now or never.

5. Consider the cares and griefs the Son of God underwent, that he might be in a capacity to become an intercessor for you; not but that Christ could have spoken a good word for man, if he had not been incarnate, but that he may effectually, according to divine ordination, undertake this office, he must put himself into our nature, continue a season on earth, suffer death for us, endure God's wrath and the curse of the law. "It behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest, in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people: for in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted."*—Heb. ii. 17, 18. And shall the eternal Son of God become man, endure such contradictions of sinners, live a sorrowful life, be betrayed, accused, condemned, spit upon, bear the cross, be nailed to it, and die to redeem us, rise again, ascend to heaven to intercede for poor sinners, while transgressors so much concerned, neglect and slight him, or do not employ him? God forbid.

6. Our Lord still follows the suit, using all means and methods to prevail with sinners to accept of him for their intercessor. How many affectionate sermons did he preach in the days of his pilgrimage? Yea, he wept over Jerusalem, uttering those affecting words, "O that thou hadst known in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace!"† What bowels of love

* See Heb. v. 2.

† Luke xix. 40, 41.

are yearning over poor sinners ! and since his ascension he hath sent his Spirit to move men's consciences, and his ministers, as ambassadors, to beseech poor sinners to be reconciled to God*—and will not all this prevail ? Who ever heard of a counsellor court a client at this rate ? And whether is this profit to him, or advantage to you ? It is true, it is a pleasure to his heart to do you good, but you will reap the benefit by it. O gratify then the heart of Christ, which he takes as a recompense for all his pains, and show not yourselves ungrateful.

7. The terms he requires are easy, safe, and honourable, upon which he will be your intercessor, yea, such as nothing shall hinder but your own wilfulness. All that he demands is your cordial accepting of him : John i. 12, “ But as many as received him, to them he gave power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” What can be easier ? here are no fees to be paid. Will you say you will have none of him ? Doth he call you to give him any thing but yourselves ? and are you not his own by right ? Doth he bid you part with any thing but your lusts, which are your greatest enemies ? What say you now ? what rational objections can you make against this blessed bargain ? The fault is your own if you be not happy : for so himself hath determined it, John v. 40, “ And you will not come unto me, that you might have life.”

Object. Doth he not say, John vi. 65, “ No man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father ? ” How can I believe except God give me grace ?

I answer, God's free grace and man's duty are very consistent. Phil. ii. 12, 13, “ Work out your own

* 2 Cor. v. 20.

salvation, with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure." God gives men natural faculties and lays them under moral obligations, and if they wilfully neglect God's appointed means, the fault will be charged on them, not on God, who is an absolute sovereign and free agent, and is beforehand with them: and they that will not do what they can, have no reason to charge God for not doing what they cannot; their own consciences will be sufficient witnesses against them, since men will not bestow a thought upon it, but judge themselves unworthy of eternal life,* and seem careless and unconcerned whether God show mercy, or Christ intercede for them or not; they will not ask a question, or stir a foot towards Christ, so that their destruction is of themselves, and they must be condemned as wicked and slothful servants.† I do therefore entreat you, charge and command you, in the name and by the authority of my sovereign Lord and Master, to whom we must shortly give account, that you put not off any longer, but immediately take God's mode of securing Christ, the darling of heaven at God's right hand, to become your friend, as you hope to speed now and another day in that celestial court.

Some directions were next proposed to be given on this subject, that Christ may be chosen as intercessor by sinners; and I might refer you to the marks of such as have interest in Christ's intercession, as helps also to obtain it—namely, the Spirit's pleading and prevailing with men, sensible sinners taking God's part and pleading against themselves, lying under a sense of want, studying Christ's mediatorial office, with experience thereof, laying hold of him by faith, and so retaining him; the Spirit helping our infirmities, re-

* Acts xiii. 46.

† Matt. xxv. 26.

gulating our prayers and conversation according to God's will, being an advocate for Christ and his interests, consciousness of acting suitably to returns of prayer, and denying ourselves in all. These are not only characters of the Christian for whom Christ intercedes, but due qualifications necessary in those that expect that our Lord should intercede for them; be sure you look after them, or else you miss your end.

But besides these, I shall lay before you these seven considerations to help you in an affair so important as this.

1. Solemnly consider what are the essentials of prevailing prayer. It is not rattling over a form of good words, but the main essentials of a right prayer are these four:—

(1.) The subject or person praying must be a child of God; "The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination to the Lord; but the prayer of the upright is his delight."* The person must be pious, in favour with God.

(2.) The act of praying must proceed from a heart engaged to God, with holy hands, without wrath or doubting;† for right ends: the primary end, God's glory; the secondary, our good, according to God's word, with submission to his will.

(3.) It must be praying in the spirit, by the assistance of the Holy Spirit helping our infirmities.‡

(4.) That which must crown all, is depending by faith on Jesus Christ sitting at God's right hand to make intercession for us, this is a right prayer. Now unless you weigh the due qualifications necessary to a right gospel prayer, you will slight it, and pass it over as a compliment. Oh, but when the Christian bethinks

* Prov. xv. 8.

† Jer. xxx. 21. 1 Tim. ii. 8.

‡ Rom. viii. 26. Jude, 20.

himself what is requisite in right prayer, he will make conscience of all, for he believes that if any of these be wanting his prayer is lost, and he is undone, for Christ will not intercede for those souls that do not pray aright, at least in the main. Consider this.

2. Endeavour to impress on your spirits, the vast difference and consequences of God's accepting and rejecting of prayers. God disowns the prayers of a graceless guilty soul; "When you make many prayers I will not hear: your hands are full of blood," Isa. i. 15. To the wicked God saith, "What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth?"* Alas, what have I to help me in my distress but crying to God for aid, and if he turn his back on me, and disown me, what will become of me? But as for God's children, a sigh, a groan goes to the heart of God, being offered up in the name of Christ; if the soul cannot speak out, but cry, Abba, God hears—Hezekiah bid but chatter like a crane or a swallow,† but God heard and owned him. Whether company would you rather be of, in the day of your distress, or in the hour of death? Surely this matter is of some concernment now, and you will find it so then.

3. Thoroughly examine your consciences with reference to your spiritual state. Be not content with imagination or may-bes; it may be Christ is my advocate, it may be not, and so leave the matter at utter uncertainties: by which you may either be continuing to live in a fool's paradise, and so die with a lie in your right hand,‡ or be left upon the rack of uncertainties; but as far as may be, put the question out of question. "Examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith; prove your own selves: know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be repro-

* Psal. l. 16.

† Isa. xxxviii. 14.

‡ Isa. xlv. 20

bates," ἀδοκίμοι, unapproved, 2 Cor. xiii. 5. The decisive trial belongs to God, but the disquisitive belongs to us. And as you would not be found under a mistake at last, deal faithfully with yourselves now: lay judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet. Try by your having or wanting the conditions of the new covenant, by characters laid down in scripture, and such marks as God's children have tried themselves by, see whether your experience will answer theirs. Be not partial, but faithful; there is deceit in general propositions. Will not a tradesman search his books? Will not a lapidary prove his precious stones? Drive the matter to an issue, form this dilemma, either I am, or I am not a child of God, either I have Christ to be my advocate, or I have not; if I have, how came I by this privilege? What scripture evidences can I give of such a thing? I must be tried another day, I will now prove mine own work, that I may have rejoicing in myself alone and not in another;* but if you cannot find it out this way, appeal to God, the searcher of hearts, as David did often; "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me, try my reins and my heart;"† let me know the best and worst of my condition; I cannot deceive thee, let me not deceive myself.

4. Get a distinct knowledge of Christ's mediatorial work, and of the manner in which all his three offices of Prophet, Priest and King, are concerned in his intercession, for though they be in some sort distinguished, yet they are not divided. It is true, we make Christ's intercession the second branch of Christ's priestly office, but therewith is joined the former part, namely, his sufferings upon the cross, for he carries his blood into the holy of holies.‡ Thus his sacrifice goes to qualify him, and secure his success as intercessor.

* Gal. vi. 4. † Psal. xxvi. 2. cxxxix. 23. ‡ Heb. ix. 12, 24.

Nor must we exclude his prophetic office, for all the promises of illumination, guidance, and direction, are the blessed fruits of this office of Christ, as prophet, which yet our Lord prays for, “for all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen.”* As to his kingly office, he sits as priest upon his throne,† and all the good that souls receive from him descends from his kingly office, as power against sin, defence against temptation, protection while we live, and deliverance from death: so that all the offices of Christ are inseparably connected with his intercession, at least in the application of the benefits accruing to souls thereby: so that you must not only respect the second part of Christ’s priestly office singly in your addresses to the throne of grace, begging the benefits of Christ’s intercession, but you must act faith on all his three offices, for obtaining good at God’s hands. Alas, sirs, you have too low conceptions of Christ’s intercession, if you look upon him in a single capacity, speaking a good word for you as one man doth for another: no, you must own Christ as having authority, not only as God equal with the Father, but acting as prophet, priest, and king at God’s right hand, and procuring our good by virtue of his office; consider this in all your addresses to him.

5. Consider the vast distance betwixt the infinite God and you. In point of nature or being, God in his essential perfections is inconceivably great and glorious; read and consider Isa. xl. 12—27, where you have a most elegant comparison betwixt the great God, and worm man: “Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand? and meted out heaven with a span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the

* 2 Cor. i. 20.

† Zech. vi. 13.

hills in a balance?—Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing.—All nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.” —How magnificently doth scripture decipher this glorious Majesty of heaven? and how diminutively doth it speak of man? yea, nobles, judges, princes in all their pomp, he makes them nothing, yea vanity. But how much more inconsiderable are inferior persons? Which of us then dare presume to approach this King of kings without a spokesman, a middle person? But then consider what further distance sin hath produced, betwixt the holy God and such impure beings as we are; “God is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity.”* And what are we but masses of sin? How can we then expect that God, this sin-hating God, should look towards us with any respect? surely a glance of his eye would confound us, there is no coming near God without a mediator, and this mediator must stand on even ground with both parties; this is Jesus Christ and none else; think of this that you rush not irreverently into the presence of the great God; yea, consider Jesus Christ is the infinite God, though he became man, yet now glorified, and you cannot have slight thoughts of him, but adore him, as well as come to God by him.

6. You must remove out of your souls and hands whatsoever is offensive to him, or a hindrance to you in your employment of Christ for your advocate; especially away with sin, all sin, heart-sin, life-sin, if you expect a share in this branch of the covenant promise, you must cleanse yourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit;† if sin reign in you, Christ will not

* Hab. i. 13.

† 2 Cor. vii. 1.

plead for you; "Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee?"* no, never expect it, if thou do not renounce sin, he will renounce thee. He will not own that soul that loves sin, if you regard iniquity in your heart, the Lord will not hear you.† He will not be a patron of sin, though he will be an advocate for sinners, that have fallen out with sin; and hate it with a perfect hatred. Yea, you must abstain from all occasions of sin, and appearances of evil.‡ Get disentangled from the world, the men of the world, or things of the world that would ensnare you, and divert you from God. Yet one thing more, if you would have Christ stand your friend, renounce your own righteousness; never think of Christ's pleading his merits for you, if you think to plead your own merits with God, these are utterly inconsistent; so saith the scripture, Rom. iv. 4, 5, and Gal. v. 3, 4, "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace;" some say it means the ceremonial law, others the moral law; doubtless "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth:"|| I know this point is much debated, but scripture leads us out of ourselves for justification by Christ alone, you must be found in him, or you are lost for ever; "Not having your own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith," Phil. iii. 8, 9, that is, by faith as the instrument to receive Christ only, it is the object that justifies, not merely the act, the *τὸ credere*, in the sense of Arminians, who dethrone Christ to exalt faith.

7. Down on your knees and entreat that this blessed Jesus may be your advocate; Christ is to be suppli-

* Psal. xciv. 20.

† Psal. lxvi. 18.

‡ 1 Thess. v. 22.

|| Rom. x. 4.

cated, not bought. "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water."—John iv. 10. Consider, friends, is not Christ the eternal Son of God, and Saviour of the world, worth asking? Why should our Lord charge you as he did his disciples, "Hitherto ye have asked nothing?"* Indeed, you ask nothing if you ask not Christ, and you ask no favour if you ask not in the name of Christ. If you were hungry, would you not ask daily bread, if thirsty, would you not cry out for drink? if you were prisoners, would you not ask for liberty? if condemned and ready to be executed, would you not account your lives worth petitioning for? Come, friends, fall down on your knees, and confess your sins, as having merited hell and damnation; but since God hath held forth Christ to be a propitiation for sin, tell the Lord how much you need him, humbly bespeak him with tears in your eyes and sorrow in your hearts, after this manner: Lord, I am among the fallen sons of Adam, condemned as soon as conceived, an undone creature, lost by the first apostacy, having added to the first sin many thousands of actual transgressions, every sin deserves thy wrath and curse, I deserve damnation; but my case is not like that of the fallen angels, thou hast sent thy only well-beloved Son to redeem lost mankind, he interposed betwixt flaming wrath and guilty sinners, he endured that which would have sunk sinners eternally into torments, and I hear he is at thy right hand to intercede for sinners, I am a miserable, helpless, hopeless sinner, "with thee the fatherless find mercy,"† thou biddest all welcome that come to thee in his name, he hath successfully managed this work of mediation, and carried thousands of souls to

* John, xvi. 24.

† Hos. xiv. 3.

heaven, whose case was as forlorn as mine; O give me Christ or else I die, give me Christ and I shall live, for he and none but he can bring me off at the bar of thy justice.

CHAP. XI.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH THE INTERCESSION OF CHRIST BECOMES A PRIVILEGE TO A CHRISTIAN.

ACCORDING to the division which I have made in treating this part of my design, I proceed to consider what concerns the people of God peculiarly, and which may lead to the following inquiries:—

1. In what cases should a Christian have recourse to Christ's intercession?

2. How a Christian should conduct himself in the enjoyment of this glorious privilege?

For the first of these, I am at a great loss, not what to say, but what to leave unsaid, not for want of matter, but the abundance of occasions; for there is no state nor occurrence of a Christian's life but affords fresh matter and occasion to employ Jesus in his important character of intercessor, and our dear Lord is ready to help in every situation and strait.

Only I desire this may be remembered, that Christ is not only a pleader for us, but an author of the mercies we want and crave; he doth not only ask the Father to bestow such blessings upon us, but he with his Father communicates them to us: so that we must not

only pray for such and such mercies for Christ's sake, but we must pray to Christ together with the Father, for he saith, "I the Father are one."—John x. 30.

Now, though the indigencies there are in the course of a Christian's pilgrimage be innumerable, yet I shall reduce the proper occasions, on which a Christian sensibly needs our Lord's intercession, to these twenty heads :—

1. In the case of original guilt and depravity of nature. Alas, saith the soul, I come into the world woefully stained with guilt and pollution; "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me:"* how shall I get this taint by natural birth taken off? But the gospel assures me, that, "If through the offence of one, many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man Jesus Christ, hath abounded to many."—Rom. v. 15. Whether Christ takes off the guilt of original sin at our birth, I know not, but he takes it off from all true penitents and believing souls that sincerely embrace Christ, and are members of his body: blessed Jesus, take me into that number.

2. In awful blindness and darkness. Alas, by nature I am woefully blind and ignorant; I can see no beauty in the things of God, no excellency in Christ, nothing of the mysteries of grace, I am blind and cannot see afar off, am travelling blindfold into utter darkness; O merciful Saviour, thou art the light of the world, the sun of righteousness, come dart down thy beams of grace into my soul, turn me from darkness to light; enlighten mine eyes, that I may not sleep the sleep of death, give me the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; that the

* Psal. li. 5.

eyes of my understanding may be enlightened, that I may behold spiritual objects in a gospel glass, for my spiritual knowledge is very imperfect.*

3. In the case of perverseness and stubbornness of the will. Woe is me, saith the Christian, my will is unruly and ungovernable; some are willingly ignorant, I pray God I be not so. But, however, my will is only imperfectly renewed; "The good that I would, I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do." Come then, dear Jesus, make me truly willing in the day of thy power; I find some poor faint wishes, some little inclinations towards thee, but feel that I cannot perform what I wish—thou canst work both to will and to do: thou blessed Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, carry on this happy beginning of a willing mind unto perfection; that as there is a readiness to will, so there may be a performance.†

4. In case of daily infirmities, and the unexpected breakings out of corruptions. O how many are my transgressions and my sins? "Innumerable evils compass me about;" every moment am I committing sin in thought, word, or deed, in omission or commission. Is it possible such vast numbers of sins should be pardoned? Yes, I will look up to my advocate, who is the propitiation for our sins, and is able to save to the utmost; he was never nonplussed with the multitude or magnitude of sins—Lord, thou canst abundantly pardon, or multiply to pardon as we multiply to sin; Lord, take away mine iniquity for it is very great: I will not despair, because I have a God to do with.‡

* 2 Pet. i. 9. John viii. 12. Mal. iv. 2. Acts xxvi. 13.
2 Cor. iv. 6. Eph. i. 17, 18.

† 2 Pet. iii. 5. Rom. vii. 19. Psal. cx. 3. Phil. ii. 13.
Heb. xii. 2. 2 Cor. viii. 11.

‡ Psal. xl. 12. 1 John ii. 2, 3. Heb. vii. 25. Isa. lv. 7.
Psal. xxv. 11.

5. In the case of deadness and distractions in holy duties. Alas, where is the Christian that finds not sad wanderings from God in duty? Vain thoughts lodge in us, and will not be shut out when we would be most serious; such dead flies mar our best pot of ointment: in the best sacrifices there is more smoke than fire. Well, but the Christian applies himself to our New-Testament Aaron to take away the iniquity of his holy things, to perfume prayer with his much incense. At all times, when the soul opens to its beloved, his hands drop with myrrh, sweet-smelling myrrh, and God smells a sweet savour from it, being offered in Christ.*

6. In slavish fears. God's children are very subject to these: a spirit of bondage returns again;† sometimes the terrors of the law and the lightnings flash in their consciences—Job, David, Heman, had their alarming seasons. When the spirits are agitated, especially when guilt is brought home, and Satan tears the wounds, what must a person do in this case? He must run to the city of refuge, to the horns of the altar, to shelter him from the grounds of his fear. David saith, “What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.”‡ Here we may have boldness to enter into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus, Heb. x. 19, 22.

7. In sad apprehensions of apostacy from God. The Christian having mournful experience of the treachery of his own heart, the violent assaults of Satan, and the weakness of grace, and having seen the dreadful falls of famous professors, cannot but fear he also may fall away. This fills the soul with sad apprehensions, which yet are a good preservative against apostacy,|| but his only refuge and remedy is Christ's intercession,

* Jer. iv. 14. Eccl. x. 1. Exod. xxviii. 38. Rev. viii. 3. Cant. v. 5. Gen. viii. 21.

† Rom. viii. 15.

‡ Psal. lvi. 3.

|| Heb. iv. 1.

Luke xxii. 31, 32, "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you, to sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." See, Christ was interceding, when Peter was most in danger of apostacy: so that the sincere Christian may make that bold challenge, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"—Rom. viii. 34—36.

8. In case of omission or intermission of duty. This is too oft the case of good men; they slight motions of the Spirit, and omit waiting on God in the season of duty, through some worldly incumbrance, as Martha, troubled about many things,* or through negligence: and conscience is sorely afflicted with this, and judgeth that the Lord will not own them; but Christ prayed for Peter when he was in temptation, little disposed for prayer; and doubtless our Lord prayed in his agony for his sleeping disciples:† and we read, Isa. lxi. 24, "Before they call I will answer." Mark it, here is sovereign grace; God is not tied to wait his people's actual praying, for Christ interposeth to prevent thousands of evils, which we know nothing of.

9. On approaches of public calamities. Such a day oft falls out, and prudent persons oft foresee these public evils, and are greatly appalled.‡ Alas, misery is coming on the nation, and we shall be involved in the common calamity, whither can we run? Who shall avoid or abide this approaching storm? Surely the gracious soul flees to his strong hold, gets into the ark, and there he is safe, God looks on the rainbow and remembers his covenant;|| there is a rainbow round about the throne, and he looks on his saints in covenant through the Mediator, Rev. iv. 3. He can hide them in the hollow of his hand till all calamities be overpast.

* Luke x. 40. † Matt. xxvi. 44. ‡ Prov. xxii. 3. || Gen. ix. 16.

10. In personal afflictions. These may befall the best of men, such as poverty, shame, censures of men, loss of relations, long and tedious afflictions of body, acute pains that may put the best of men hard to it. What shall I do in this case? Is there any hope or help? Whither must I go? Why, still thou must go the same road, to God in Christ, this was Job's refuge and remedy, Job xix. 25, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," he is speaking a good word for me, either to moderate the affliction, or to remove it, or however to sanctify it, that it shall do me no hurt but good. Remember Isa. lxiii. 9, "In all their afflictions he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence," that is, Christ, "saved them." Fear not you have a good companion.

11. In desertion, which indeed is the heaviest trouble that can happen to a poor soul. "When thou didst hide thy face, I was troubled;"* no wonder, for in his favour is life, then the want of it must be death. David saith, his spirit was overwhelmed;† Heman saith, "while I suffer thy terrors, I am distracted:"‡ what must a person do in this forlorn state? still he must centre on Christ the rock of ages. As terrible as God looks, he commands the light to shine out of darkness, when you can behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, 2 Cor. iv. 6. If you walk in darkness, you must stay yourselves on your God: || get under Christ's wings, the wings of the cherubim, then you are safe, and he will make your position pleasant.

12. In spiritual conflicts. Alas, the feeble Christian is in great hazard of being borne down by Satan, the world, and the flesh; he is set sometimes with his back to the wall; these intestine wars strike up con-

* Psalm xxx. 7.

† Psalm lxxxviii. 15.

‡ Psalm lxxvii. 3, 4.

|| Isa. l. 10.

trary alarms in his soul, and make him at his wits' end, not knowing the issue. Whither now must the soul go for a reserve, but to the Captain of our salvation, * who can with a word of his mouth confound all the soul's enemies? "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." † He alone can lead captivity captive, he hath spoiled principalities and powers, he triumphed over them upon the cross, ‡ much more when he is now at God's right hand. The believing soul hath benefit thereby, and is more than a conqueror through him that loved us; this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. ||

13. In relative concerns. How solicitous is the Christian for those that depend on him, or are related to him? O what shall I do for my husband, wife, son, daughter, brother, or friend, who is as mine own soul? "O that Ishmael might live before thee!" § How can I see the damnation of the members of my family? Alas, what can I do for them? "I have great heaviness, and continual sorrow of heart, for my poor kindred after the flesh." ¶ Well, I know no other course I can take for them, than put them into the hands of Christ the mediator, to hold them up to the Father for converting and pardoning grace. O that Christ would take these children and bless them! there is grace enough in the covenant for all. Is not my child, in a sense, clean by relation to a poor weak believer, and dedication to God? **

14. In the enjoyment of privileges. I confess divine Providence hath cast my lot under a pleasant sun-

* Heb. ii. 10.

† 1 John iii. 8.

‡ Eph. iv. 8. Col. ii. 15.

|| Rom. viii. 37. 1 John v. 4.

§ Gen. xvii. 18.

¶ Rom. ix. 2, 3.

** 1 Cor. vii. 14. Matt. xxviii. 19.

shine of powerful preaching, lively praying, baptism, and the Lord's supper, dispensed according to divine institution, which might make me fat and well-liking, but alas I am barren, dead, and hard-hearted still, nothing will do except the Spirit of grace breathe upon my heart. "Awake, O north wind, and come thou south, blow upon thy garden that the spices thereof may flow out."* Dear Jesus that walkest in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, † reach this breast of mine, and let my heart long after thee, bring down some illapses from above, as the fruits of Christ's ascension and session at God's right hand, for the perfecting of the saints, for the edifying of the body of Christ. ‡ Send thy Spirit from above, (according to thy prayer and promise) which may lead us into all truth, and bring all things to remembrance, and prepare my soul for glory. ||

15. In the want of ordinances. Such a day hath been, and may come again, when persons shall find a famine of the word, when they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and not find it. § When poor souls shall faint for want of the bread of life, what shall we then do? Our business is to feed on Christ the bread of life: his flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed, ¶ he needs no channel of ordinances, but can drop down immediate influences from above, that in days of famine we may be satisfied. ** He can feed his children in the wilderness with suitable and sufficient manna: if you have the marrow and design of ordinances in Christ, you have all and in all. ††

* Cant. iv. 16.

‡ Eph. iv. 10, 12, 13.

§ 1 Sam. iii. 1. Amos viii. 12.

** Psalm xxxvii. 19.

† Rev. ii. 1.

|| John xiv. 26. xvi. 13.

¶ John vi. 48, 51, 55.

†† Col. iii. 11.

16. In sharp divisions and controversies amongst professors. This goes to the heart of a gracious peaceable Christian, who desires to live in love and unity with all. O it is sad to see the the seamless coat of Christ rent in pieces; for the divisions of Reuben there are great thoughts or searchings of heart.* What shall a poor soul do in this case? surely get alone and lament it; "Mark them which cause divisions, and avoid them."† Espouse catholic principles, maintain a charitable spirit; but above all have recourse to Jesus Christ our common Saviour, and entreat that he by grace would irradiate men's minds with saving truths, sanctify their hearts, mortify their corruptions, and establish their souls on a right foundation, both as to doctrine and principle, and Christ is the only foundation, 1 Cor. iii. 11—13, Eph. ii. 20, 21.

17. In the public concerns of the church. The good child of God cannot but bear the state of Zion upon his heart; "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning."‡ The pious man is like Eli, he sits trembling for the ark of God, he loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Alas, what can such a poor insignificant creature as I do? well, I will put it into the hands of my Lord Jesus, who dearly purchased the church with his own blood, and now sits at God's right hand to intercede for it. O God, look after thy spiritual Zion, "and make thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary, for the Lord's sake."|| that is, for Jesus Christ's sake.

18. In great undertakings. Sometimes it is so that Providence calls some Christians out to unusual employments, such as they are sensible of their own inability to manage, and would rather shift them off,

* Judges v. 15, 16.

† Rom. xvi. 17.

‡ Psal. cxxxvii. 5.

|| Dan. ix. 17.

as in the case of Moses to be a magistrate, and Jeremiah to be a prophet,* they both excused themselves; such a case may frequently fall out, what then must a person do? Why he must first consult the clearness of his call to that station, and when that is scripturally clear, he must have recourse to Jesus Christ, by whom kings rule, and who sets up officers in his church as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers,† as the fruits of his ascension; now you must go to Christ, both for a commission from him, and for qualifications to manage it to God's glory and the church's edification.

19. In case of God's refusing to answer your prayers. It hath been thus with some of God's servants; the church saith, "Also, when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer:"‡ Job and David sometimes complain of this, and this is a sore affliction, but alas, what have they to help them but importunate prayer? If prayer have lost its virtue I am undone. But man, consider, the answer may be deferred, yet not denied; and withal reflect upon the motives, end, and manner of thy praying, it may be thou didst pray amiss; thy business now is to put it into the hand of thy advocate, it will not miscarry if it be by faith lodged there; look again and see what was absolutely necessary for such a transaction, and fear not as long as thou art praying and waiting, thou hast something of an answer in hand, and more in hope, which will not fail.

20. In the soul's approach to death and judgment. O this is a solemn thing, for it is the statute law of heaven; "As it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.|| Death is formidable in a natural sense, judgment in a moral sense; this body

* Exod. iv. 13. Jer. i. 6.

‡ Lam. iii. 8.

† Eph. iv. 10, 11.

|| Heb. ix. 27.

and this soul must part, and meet again before a solemn tribunal; O how shall I come off then? truly, I have no other way than to secure my advocate to appear for me; it is Jesus alone that plucks out the sting of death; if I can get Jesus in mine arms, I can pass safely through the valley of the shadow of death and fear no evil;* and when I go to the grave I but lay me down to sleep, yea more than so, I shall sleep in Jesus,† and O what a soft warm bed will that be? and as to judgment, I have one to answer for me, the judge of the court is my friend, and I know I shall not be condemned, for when Christ who is my life shall appear, I shall appear with him in glory.‡

This, this is the glorious privilege of a child of God, a member of Christ, whether he know it or not, but many do know it, and have the comfort of it.

Thus much for the the former branch of this division, how and in what cases believers should improve this great privilege of Christ's intercession.

The second branch in reference to genuine believers that have interest in Christ's intercession, is to consider how they should conduct themselves when enjoying this privilege, and I shall give these ten directions:—

1. Get clear evidences of your interest in Christ's intercession. I suppose you to have interest, but labour to get it cleared up to yourselves; your safety lies in the former, your comfort lies in the latter. O what satisfaction will it be to a pious heart to think, Jesus Christ appears in the presence of God for me; he bears my name, my person, my prayers before the throne, he also bears away my failings; I am accepted in the beloved.|| The church prays, Cant. viii. 6, "Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm." My

* 1 Cor. xv. 55—57. Heb. ii. 15. Psal. xxiii. 4.

† 1 Thess. iv. 14. ‡ Col. iii. 4. || Eph. i. 6.

name is upon the breast and shoulders of the high priest, in the holy of holies;* he acts for me, speaks a good word for me, as if I were the only person concerned, yet others not excluded. He is now speaking for me, when I dare not or cannot speak for myself; he loved me and gave himself for me, and now he ever lives to make intercession for me.† O what a privilege is this.

2. Do not in the least question the prevalence of your just suits; see they be scriptural, grounded upon a promise, and then see that your requests be by faith put into Christ's hands, and fear not speeding, for our advocate hath the greatest interest in God the Father, he is his only well-beloved Son, his dear Son, he always hears him;‡ the Father was so pleased with his Son's undertakings on earth, that he welcomes him to heaven with this grant, "Ask of me and I will give thee."||— But he asks no more of God than what he hath purchased by laying down a valuable consideration for it, so that God's justice pleads for his suit. See your matters be right, and the manner of your asking be right as to the main, and then come with confidence, fear not a disappointment.

3. Trust God for what is needful for you over and besides what you petition for. Have you the tree? you have all the fruit growing upon that tree: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"§ Alas, we poor beggars are short-sighted and short-spirited, we know not what we want, and often fail in asking what we know, but we have an astonishing word for this, Eph. iii. 20, "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or

* Exod. xxviii. 9, 12, 28, 29.

† Gal. ii. 20. Heb. vii. 25.

‡ Matt. iii. 17. Col. i. 13. John xi. 42.

|| Psal. ii. 8.

§ Rom. viii. 32.

think;" we can ask much and think more, but woe were to us, if we had not many preventing mercies that we asked not, nor knew any thing of, before they were received; trust God for these, and thank God for them, because he has been better to us than our prayers.

4. Remember Christ at God's right hand who remembers you to your great advantage; let your hearts and thoughts be above with Christ in meditation and affections, Col. iii. 1, 2. Your good Joseph exalted forgets not you, why should you forget him? God complains of Israel in the wilderness, that then they had his approbation, but when they were put into a fat pasture and were filled, then they forgot God, Hos. xiii. 5, 6, as if God should say to them, and to thee in a like case, time was when you were in a low condition, and had no other relief, then you and I were better acquainted, many a visit I had from you, but now you are filled, I hear no more of you, you think you need me not, but I will draw the veil over you again, and see then what you will make of it; consider what base disingenuousness this is.

5. Act suitably to this great privilege. O live at the rate of this mercy, do not disoblige God by any unsuitable carriage, this is his own caution, Exod. xxiii. 20, 21, "Behold I send an angel before thee," beware of him and obey his voice, provoke him not, for he will not pardon your transgressions, for my name is in him." Observe it, men might say there is more lenity in the Son than in the Father, if we offend we will fly to the Son; no, no, you cannot think he will pardon those sins that God will not pardon, for he is the same in will and essence with the Father, infinite in power, holiness, justice, and truth, and will not humour sinners in their licentious ways; there-

fore you must honour Son, as you honour the Father,* by acting like Christians, obeying his commands, and living conscientiously, as under the law of a mediator; though he pardon sin upon repentance, yet he will by no means gratify sinners in vain courses, or in ways of impenitency. Remember the wrath of the Lamb is severe,† as well as of Jehovah.

6. Persevere in the good ways of God. Be not discouraged with the greatest oppositions; remember, Christ ever lives to make intercession for you.‡ You need not fear his deserting you, if you keep close to duty he will stand by you; you shall see he will hold with you, and he will hold you up: read and think of that good word, Heb. iv. 14, "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession." Here is a double ground of encouragement to persevere:—

(1.) That Jesus our head is already in heaven, and if the head be above water, the body cannot drown.

(2.) The business that Christ is managing in heaven, which is to intercede as a great high priest, carrying that work on in the behalf of believers, is in no danger of creating disappointment, if you fail not to employ him; and if you do fail, he will still manage his work for others, but it will be your particular loss, the loss of your souls; O tremble at this, if you fall away after these discoveries, your case will be deplorable, Heb. vi. 5, 6.

7. Be not afraid to ask great things at the hands of God in the name of Christ. Be not daunted with the greatness of your sins, or variety of your wants, but come boldly to the throne of grace, that you may ob-

* John v. 23.

† Rev. vi. 16.

‡ Heb. vii. 25.

tain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need, Heb. iv. 16. Christ's merits are adequate to all the saints' wants and guilt, and the very appearance which he discovers of having suffered is a sufficient plea for believers; as it is storied of Amintas, who appeared as advocate for his brother Æschylus who was strongly accused and likely to be condemned to die: now, Amintas having performed great services, and merited highly of the commonwealth, in whose service one of his hands was cut off in the field, he comes into the court on his brother's behalf, and said nothing but only lifted up his arm, and shewed them *cubitus sine manu*, an arm without a hand, which so moved them that, without a word speaking, they freed his brother immediately. And hath not our Jesus suffered more for us than the loss of a hand? Yea, the loss of his life, whereby he hath purchased those things for which he prays, yea, those for which you pray, if you pray aright, and shall they not be granted? Yes, doubtless: he makes larger offers than Ahasuerus to Esther, "What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom:"* but what are earthly kingdoms or all the world, to God's gifts of grace and glory? Open your mouths wide, and he will fill them, Ps. lxxxix. 10.

8. Thank God for what you have met with as an answer to prayer, and put it altogether to the score of Christ's intercession. It was not your piety, parts, nor importunities—it was not your enlargedness, zeal, or fervency, that obtained those good things: no, no, you must say as David, Psal. cxv. 1, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake." We have no reason to ascribe any thing to our own worth or good-

* Esth. v. 3.

ness, but to God's free grace and Christ's intercession. Rob not our Lord Jesus of any of his glory, it is dear to him, and he will not give it to another; there is no parting stakes betwixt our blessed Lord and creatures: no, no, exalt King Jesus only, give him the glory due to his name. If God have given you any signal mercies, as answers of prayer, let Christ have the credit thereof, for not one drop of saving mercy comes from God to souls but through Christ, and our business is to return our gratitude in the same channel. A good man never went to bed or rose, but he had that doxology in his mouth or on his heart, "Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift," 2 Cor. ix. 15.

9. Forgive and pray for others, though they have ever so much offended you. It is our Saviour's precept, Matt. v. 44, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you." This is a hard word to flesh and blood, but Christ practised it, and if you be his disciples you must follow his example. Study 1 Pet. ii. 21—23. You will say, was this ever practised by any mortal man? surely this goes against the grain of nature, to love them that hate us. I answer, as grace transcends nature, so sometimes it contradicts nature's corrupted emotions: but grace teacheth us to love their souls, not their vices, to pity and pray for those that are maliciously set against us. God saith concerning Job's three friends that wronged him, "My servant Job shall pray for you:"* it alludes to an advocate in court, that moves the judge in behalf of an offender. So did Job notwithstanding all their severe censures of him, yea, he offered sacrifices, and the Lord accepted him for them and for himself, for the Lord turned the capti-

* Job xlii. 8—10.

vity of Job. The people reproached Jeremiah, yet he stood before God to speak good for them : so Stephen, David, and many others—this is a piece of brave self-denial, following Christ's example.

10. Especially let this be your main business, to plead with God for Christ's interest upon earth, the church of God, the success of ordinances, and the conversion of sinners to God. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee."* A pious man will prefer Jerusalem above his chief joy;† his comfort is bound up in the church's prosperity, and oh what sorrow doth he conceive upon Zion's fall? how doth he give way to his feelings in the earnestness of prayer? Isa. lxii. 6, 7, "Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth." O that there were greater numbers of such remembrancers! God forbid that we should be taken up with our own houses, while the house of God lies waste. O that all that love God would solemnly engage in this momentous work: you join with Christ herein, of whom it is said, Zech. i. 12, 13, "Then the angel of the Lord answered and said, O Lord of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem, and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years? and the Lord answered the angel that talked with me, with good words and comfortable words." Public spirited men have usually peculiar privileges. Come, sirs, help poor Zion in her distresses. All that have a tongue to speak, or a spirit to breathe, stir up yourselves to keep with us a departing gospel. Is it nothing to you whether God go or stay? have you no souls of your own? have not your children precious souls? can they

* Psalm cxxii. 6.

† Psalm cxxxvii. 5, 6.

be saved if the gospel of salvation go? Come all that have any sense of eternal concerns upon your heart, take hold of his strength, and say we are called by thy name, leave us not: I advise you to borrow the complaints and pleas you find in scripture, especially Isa. lxiii. and lxiv. Jer. xiv.

CHAP. XII.

THE CONCLUSION.

AND now what shall I say? The vast distance betwixt the infinite, incomprehensible Majesty, and a finite worm crawling on this dunghill, amazeth and overwhelmeth my finite faculties: how can I come near Jehovah? And yet the greater distance that sin hath put betwixt the holy God and a guilty, polluted sinner, doth more confound me, so that I may say, How dare I come near him? No, I have great reason to fear banishment from him into eternal torments. But behold, a deep mystery, a transcendent mercy, Jesus Christ the eternal Son of God is become man, hath suffered divine wrath, quenched the flaming sword of justice, and paved a new and living way to the divine Majesty; so that now in Christ Jesus, we who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ.* Here is a wonder of grace, heaven and hell meet, and sweetly converse together. Christ hath smoothed the face of justice, hath dried up Jordan, and driven back the Red Sea, that the ransomed may pass over; yea, he hath shipped over this dead sea thou-

* Heb. x. 19, 20. Eph. ii. 13.

sands of gracious souls into a land of light, life, and love.

O gracious and blessed Jesus, what hast thou been? what hast thou done? what hast thou suffered for wretched man? What an astonishing journey didst thou take from the empyrean heaven to this dunghill of earth? What a poor tattered garment of human flesh didst thou put on? Yea, what rendings, stretchings, tearings, did it bear? What malice of devils, what contradiction of sinners, what effects of divine displeasure didst thou endure? till at last thou didst breathe out thy soul upon the cross, wast laid in the grave, as a malefactor, and all this by the malignant Jews, for no fault, but thousands of good deeds, healing the sick, casting out devils, raising the dead. But thou didst arise by thine own power, ascendedst to heaven, and sittest at the right hand of the Majesty on high,* which is thy proper sphere, where thou art negotiating the affairs of thy purchased church, and every individual soul that is by faith united to thee.

But will this blessed Jesus, exalted so high, stoop so low as to cast a propitious eye upon so vile a creature as I am? Yes, he looks upon it as his interest, nay, as his honour to own his meanest member. Saviour of lost man, break through these clouds that my sin hath raised, shine on my soul, with the light of thy countenance, send thy Holy Spirit to plead thy cause within me, yea, to plead my cause with thee, and then I doubt not but thou wilt plead my cause with the Father. Thy chariot is paved with love, and thou makest the humblest believer ride with thee therein;† and dost bear them on thy breastplate before the throne. I have been comparing my Lord's account book in the covenant of grace, with what counterpart I find in

* Heb. i. 3.

† Cant. iii. 10.

mine own breast, and dare appeal to the heart-searching God : Thou knowest whether these workings be the Spirit of adoption, thou knowest that I am not wicked, that there is no way or undisturbed road of wickedness in my heart ; I have sin, yet do not regard but hate mine own iniquity.* It is true, old ashes of youthful lusts raise up new sparks in my soul, both to enflame and torment me : but I trust in the merit of Christ for pardon, and the Spirit of Christ for power against corruption, and I hope I may say with a great man, let young and strong corruptions and his free grace be yoked together, and let Christ and my sins deal it betwixt them : they are too strong for me, not for him : if he be on my side I shall come off victorious, and if he speak for me I shall prevail ; I shall be in some sort omnipotent through Christ strengthening me.† Yet my Lord alone shall be set in his own chair of state, for all the honour is due to him alone. If ever I speed in prayer, it is for Christ's sake ; if I be exempted from evil, it is through Christ ; if heaven come down to me, or if I mount up to heaven, it is through Christ. Christ is heaven, the best part of heaven, all heaven, yea, more than all heaven.

It is some comfort to me, to reflect upon the communion of saints. O what a glorious cloud of incense ascends daily out of the angels' hand, along with the prayers of the saints ! What a harmony of petitions breathed out by the same spirit, besets the throne of grace ! I am not alone, there is a sweet symphony in the ears of God, all pleading for the same things for substance : but these (as much grace as they have, and as well as God loves them) shall not prevail for one mercy without this advocate, the blessed Jesus. O then how desirable, how precious, how prevailing an

* Psal. cxxxix. 23. lxvi. 18.

† Phil. iv. 13.

advocate is Christ, we need not fear him, nor be jealous of him ; however, I will believe good of Christ till he disappoint and deceive me, which is impossible, and will take his word for guarantee, that he will fill up all blanks in my prayers according to his promise, and obtain for me what I want, and more than I ask, yea, more than I can think I need ; my Lord bids me open my mouth wide, but his ear is more capacious than my lips, else I were undone. Gracious Saviour, thou hast kindled a live coal in my heart, which I hope all the waters of affliction cannot quench ; I must live and die in thy debt, and never be able to pay the thousandth part. O that my heart were more enflamed in love to thee, and delight in thee ; thou hast done all this for me, and put an earnest within me, and wilt in due time make good the full bargain. My head is in heaven, and as he hath taken possession for me, so he is negotiating my affairs there, and presenting and mending my distracted prayers ; all I can do is to bring a lame faith to Christ, holding out a stump instead of an arm, like a lame beggar, and crying : Lord Jesus, work a miracle, Lord mend the frame of my heart, raise my soul as high as heaven. O that I could send up the tribute of praises to my well-beloved, and receive back returns of prayer ! My solicitor is not tired with my broken suits, but the oftener and the welcomer, so I be sincere, and his grace must make me so. Lord, help me to persevere in following hard after thee, and let me find a young green paradise of pleasure in my attendance on thee. O for some first fruits before I reap the full harvest ! and give me patience to wait thy time ; yet abundance of earnest will not diminish the principal sum. Let me have more of holiness, and I shall have more of heaven ; O that I may have a heart to hold intercourse with the blessed Jesus, to lay all

my cares and burdens on him who is able to save to the uttermost ; the more I can lay on him, the easier shall I be. Had he not been all sufficient, he had been hard put to it since he undertook to be my guardian ; I have oft made foul work, but he hath mended what I have marred, and set all straight again, and I trust he will do so to the end. I often lose myself, but let me never lose thee ; keep hold of me and I am safe, put my tears in thy bottle, write my prayers in thy book ; thou knowest what hath passed betwixt thyself and my soul, and wilt not deny thy own hand writing, and the workings of the Spirit of adoption ; weakness I own, thy work thou wilt not disown. I lift and lift again this heart, these prayers, these praises of mine to put them where thou wouldst have them, that thou mayest carry them to thy Father, and to my Father for acceptance.

But O what astonishing damps are upon my trembling spirit, when I rise off my knees and think, will God hear such a distracted prayer of a poor hard-hearted wretch ? surely, conscience saith, no : but what saith faith ? A poor trembling faith puts it into the hands of my advocate, and then saith, he can make something of it, and my eyes are fastened upon him at God's right hand, and thereby faith is elevated, and despair gradually vanisheth.

LIFE IN GOD'S FAVOUR;

A DISCOURSE

ADAPTED TO

DEATH-THREATENING TIMES.

THE EPISTLE TO THE READER.

CHRISTIAN READER,

AMONGST all the useful treatises that the press hath of late exposed to public view, I have not met with any, as far as I remember, that hath purposely and directly treated on the subject of this discourse, notwithstanding it must be owned to be needful, seasonable, and profitable. It is a maxim to which men generally subscribe, and not a point of controversy, that, "In God's favour is life:" yea, God's favour is pleaded for and pretended to by persons of every description, of all religions and persuasions. To be excluded from it, men think a serious and awful thing: the rich and great cannot say they are above it, the poor and profane will hope well, and desire to live and die in God's favour; the ignorant dream of God's favour, as their only sanctuary, though God saith plainly, "It is a people of no understanding, therefore he that hath made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour."* The learned Rabbies and grave sages of the world can discuss, and think to define the favour or grace of God, and even to confine it to themselves, and are ready to say as the chief priests and Pharisees of old, "This people who know not the law are cursed:"† intimating that themselves are blessed, as being high in God's books, and advanced into God's favour above their neighbours. But Christ saith to them that justify themselves, "That which is highly esteemed amongst men, is abomination in the sight of God."‡ The aspiring Nimrods, the flattering Absaloms of the world, judge that they have the favour of God, when they have the favour of princes or people; but Haman and Herod soon receive a confutation

* Isa. xxvii. 11.

† John vii. 49.

‡ Luke xvi. 15.

from divine indignation, the one being hanged up like a dog, and worms eating the loathsome carcass of the other. The greedy griping sons of good old Eli, who would have the best, and quickly, or would take their part by force, though they boasted of the ark and trusted to it, as having God Almighty in a manner engaged to them thereby, yet themselves were miserably slain, and their posterity must basely crouch for a piece of silver, and a morsel of bread.* Though carnal persons may bless the covetous rich man, yet God abhors him;† if Jeconiah will set his eyes and heart only on his covetousness, and build him an house by unrighteousness, and chambers by wrong, and use his neighbour's service without wages, so he shall die unlamented, and be buried with the burial of an ass; the best part of his name shall be taken away, and he shall be called only Coniah, and though he were as the signet upon God's right hand, highly favoured, and advanced as ever mortal creature was, yet God would pluck him thence, and cast him out.‡ Though the king of Tyre be as the anointed cherub, and say he is God, and set his heart as the heart of God, yet he shall be brought down to the pit. || Though mystical Babylon say, I sit as queen, and glorify herself, and be big with hopes of immunity from the favour of the husband, whose spouse she pretends to be, yet it shall appear she is the habitation of devils, and her plagues shall come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine, and she shall be utterly burnt with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her. § If Israel of old fill the world with the loud acclamations of "the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we, the church, the church, God's peculiar people, his portion, his chosen heritage," ¶ yet God can take his leave of Jerusalem, as he did of Shiloh, and cast the people out of his sight; and though they were to God once for a name and a praise, and for a glory, yet they become like a rotten girdle that is good for nothing; yea, God will dash them in pieces one against another, and will not pity, nor spare, nor have mercy, but destroy them.** If Chorazin and Bethsaida had mighty works

* 1 Sam. ii. 16. iv. 4. ii. 34.

† Jer. xxii. 13, 17, 19, 21, 26.

§ Rev. xviii. 3.

¶ Jer. vii. 4.

† Psalm x. 3.

|| Ezek. xxviii. 3.

** Jer. xiii. 11, 14.

done in them, and were highly favoured with our Saviour's glorious miracles, yet "it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for them:" and Capernaum that was exalted to heaven in privileges, shall be cast down to the lowest, hottest hell in punishment.* The seven Asiatic churches may lose their splendour, and Laodicea herself that was rich, increased with goods, and had need of nothing in her own conceit, that is, was adorned with brave preachers, glorious privileges, sound doctrine and notable gifts of the Spirit, whereby she thought herself more favoured by God than all the rest, yet shall be so disgusting and disowned, that she shall be vomited out of his mouth like lukewarm water offensive to his stomach.† Thousands in the world are mistaken about this great affair of such infinite concernment. Oh what a discovery shall be made, and what a woful disappointment shall many have at death and judgment! Some will think to plead moral righteousness, others common performances, others their splendid professions, admission amongst, and communion with the saints: some will plead their excellent gifts in praying, preaching and high preferment in the church, as Judas: others will say, have we not eaten and drunk in thy presence? hast thou not taught in our streets?‡ But he will answer these all alike, with "I know you not, I will not own you, depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Oh dreadful and unexpected sentence! what, *we depart*, we that were civil neighbours, good churchmen, orthodox believers, sober livers; *must we depart*? we that heard the word gladly, commended the preacher, practised many things, had strong convictions, hated idolatry, loved God's pure worship, and took much delight in approaching to God, wilt thou not have favour for us? must we be banished from thee? oh strange disappointment. Alas, alas, what a discovering and dispiriting, and confounding day will that be to several persons, who upon false, self-flattering grounds were in this world as strangely conceited of their being in God's favour, as if they saw their names in God's book, or could look into God's heart and would by no means be beaten off this conceit; they shall now see themselves wofully deluded by Satan and their own deceit-

* Matt. xi. 20—24.

† Rev. iii. 16, 17.

‡ Luke xiii. 26.

ful hearts, when it is too late to get into God's favour. Oh this makes honest ministers' hearts ache, and many good men weep in secret for the pride and folly of self-deceiving souls. If we tell them there is danger, bid them search, and deal plainly with their hearts, they look upon us as enemies, think we make more ado than needs, by affrighting them with scarecrows, and making false alarms; they scorn our words, and bid us look to ourselves, assuring us that they are safe enough, and are in God's favour as well as the best of us, though their inconsistent expressions and irregular actions give ample ground of suspicion to intelligent observers: and alas, we are forced to leave them with a deep sigh, and a sad fear that we shall never see them at God's right hand with the saints another day.

And as many mistake, and are in danger of miscarrying to all eternity; so this favour, this special favour of God must needs be of absolute necessity, though whilst men live in prosperity, in the affluence and confluence of worldly comforts, they make a poor shift to enjoy themselves, drowning the noise of conscience, rocking themselves asleep in the cradle of ease, running out of God's blessing into the warm sun, as we use to say: yet a day is coming that will burn as an oven, and all the proud and profane shall be as stubble, and it shall leave them neither root nor branch;* their worldly wealth shall perish, and their hopes give up the ghost, when the heavens shall crack over their heads, and the earth tremble under their feet. Oh, what will God's favour and Christ's love-smiles be worth in that day, when he shall call the dead out of their graves, and bid them stand forth to receive the final sentence of absolution, or condemnation, according to their state? then, O then to have the favour of the Lord, the Judge of heaven and earth, will be worth a thousand worlds. When God shall summon us by his messenger death, and tell us that the days of our appointed time on the earth are finished, he will remove us hence, to give an account of our stewardship; oh then God's special favour will stand us in infinite stead! In prosperity what can quiet a capacious soul that is still prying and peeping beyond sublunaries for satisfaction? It is he, the letters of whose name are quiescent, that can give quietness, even the great Jehovah. In

* Mal. iv. 1.

adversity there is an apparent discovery of the necessity of divine special favour. When God giveth quietness who then can make trouble, and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him? * Then indeed in the day of calamity, God's favour is seen to be seasonable, when the favour of men is lost, and all things look black about us. O the joy and comfort souls have felt in the light of God's countenance, one smile from heaven hath fetched the saints from death to life.

Hence it is, that God's children have desired of the Lord some tokens of love, while they have been in this vale of tears. Let no man scoff at this, the Scripture warrants it: "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."—Jer. xxxiii. 3. So our Saviour, "He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and manifest myself to him."—John xiv. 21. This is a sufficient warrant for our prayers and expectations in God's way, for as the word of promise encourageth us, so the word of precept directeth and regulateth our desires; certainly God hath promised great things to believers who keep in his way, and hath made good his promises on all occasions, in all ages.

What that token for good was which the princely prophet David prays for, Psalm lxxxvi. 17, I will not positively determine; but sure I am, it was some evidence of God's favour to him, either in a miraculous or gracious way, in ordinances or in providence, by way of influence or evidence, for quickening or comforting his heart. I confess, if this holy man, this man after God's own heart, had some special ground to expect extraordinary manifestations being made to him, or for him, it becomes not us to follow him therein, except we had the like ground either as to external or internal things, lest we provoke God, and ruin ourselves by enthusiastic presumptions. Sleidan in his Commentaries, † gives us a large account of Thomas Munster in Alstet, a town belonging to the Duke of Saxony in Thuringia, who exclaimed against Luther, as giving too much liberty: "For," saith he, "the body must be made lean with fasting, there should be simple apparel, the countenance must be framed to gravity, a man should speak seldom, wear a long beard," &c.

* Job xxxiv. 29.

† Book 5, fol. 55.

But to the purpose, he taught his followers to ask of God a sign, whereby he might testify that he cared for them, and that they were of the true religion; and albeit he shewed not a token soon, yet must they nevertheless proceed, pray still, expostulate, yea, complain loudly of God, that he dealt not well with them. Oh blasphemy! "This expostulation and anger," saith he, "is of God well accepted, for that he perceiveth hereby our earnest mind and zeal, and then no doubt, being thus urgently solicited, he will declare himself by some notable sign, and quench the thirst of our minds, dealing with us as he did in times past with the old fathers." And then he makes a long speech to his followers, who were eight thousand, tells them they must not be afraid of their adversaries' guns: "For all the bullets they shoot," saith he, "I will receive with my coat. Behold," saith he, "what a merciful God we have, behold a sign or token of his everlasting good-will towards us, lift up your eyes, and see the rainbow in the sky, for seeing we have the same painted in our ensign, God declareth plainly, that he will aid us in battle, and destroy the tyrants, wherefore set upon them with a bold courage." They sung a song, and thereby call for the help of the Holy Ghost; but when the ordnance played upon them, they were amazed and overwhelmed, saith the historian, neither defending themselves, nor seeking safety by flight, trusting to Munster's promise, and looking for help from heaven; but they were miserably deceived, they were scattered, three thousand were slain, three hundred beheaded, Frankuse taken, and Munster put upon the rack. This story I mention to shew the danger of a delusion, and imagination of tokens from heaven, as in their case:

1. In open rebellion against lawful magistrates.
2. For confirmation of their religion.
3. Importuning and wrangling with God without a word of promise.
4. Charging God foolishly if he deny, &c.

We may call these truly fanatics, as Calvin oft doth; and whoever build their religion upon the like weak and sandy foundation, will find it insufficient, and themselves deceived. God's children own none but a Bible religion, and dare not expect any thing of God, but what they have a scripture war-

rant for in precept or precedent : but how far believers in succeeding ages may imitate the saints in scripture story, asking of God a sign, and enjoying it, I shall not at present discuss. It is true, history tells us of the nobles of Bohemia,* being to suffer the next day for the testimony of Christ, spent the night in prayer, singing the eighty-sixth Psalm, oft repeating the last petition, “Shew me a token for good ;” one of them said, “Be of good cheer, for even in this God hath heard your voice, to-morrow he will shew some wonderful sign, whereby he will witness that we suffer for his cause.” In the morning presently after sun-rising, a beautiful bow appeared, and compassed the heavens, the martyrs looked out at a window, and saw a rainbow of an unusual colour, though the heavens were clear, and there had been no rain for two days before ; on which they fell on their faces, lifted up their hands and voices, praised God for this sign shewed from heaven, and afterwards suffered cheerfully that day for the truth. Another in the Marian days cried out at the stake, “Son of God, shine upon me ;” immediately the sun in the firmament shone on him, though it was a dark and cloudy day. Many other instances I might produce, with which church histories abound, which it becomes not us to question, since God may grant peculiar dispensations to his suffering servants, in extraordinary cases, out of his usual course, but it is not safe for us to prescribe, or to expect that God should gratify our curiosity ; we have a more sure word of prophecy contained in the holy scriptures,† which are able to make us wise unto salvation, yea, to make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished to every good work. If we leave this scriptural way, and look for tokens from God in any other way, we expose ourselves to the danger of being deceived by lying wonders, and Satanical delusions.‡ The devil would have persuaded Augustine to seek a sign from God, but he would not, because he saw many deluded by such apparitions, and therefore saith, “He that now expects miracles, is himself the greatest miracle,” that is, of unbelief. Satan hath often transformed himself into an angel of light, and imposed upon credulous superstition. Gerson tells how Satan appeared to a

* Clark's Martyr. p. 170. † 2 Pet. i. 19. Eph. ii. 20. 2 Tim. iii. 15, 17.

‡ 2 Thess. ii. 9.

holy man in a most glorious manner,* professing himself to be Christ, saying, he appeared to him because he deserved respect before others, but he answered I desire not to see my Saviour in this vale of tears, it shall suffice me to see him in the heavens, *Sit, in alio sæculo non in hoc, visio tua, merces mea*, “let in the other world, not in this, the vision of thee be my reward.” The same we find appeared to Luther, in the form of a crucified Christ upon the wall, but on his solemn protestation the apparition immediately vanished.

It becomes God’s people to adhere to the law and testimony, and to desire and welcome such tokens of God’s favour as these:—

1. God’s holy ordinances. God gave the Sabbath to Israel as a sign of his being their God; Exod. xxxi. 13. The ark was a token of his presence, so are the word and sacraments to us. God forbid such a day should come on us, not to see our signs; Psal. lxxiv. 9. Better, said the people of Antioch, want the shining of the sun, than the preaching of Chrysostom.

2. The fruit of ordinances. If this and that man be born in Zion, it is a good sign of God’s favour, and that God will establish it; Psal. lxxxvii. 5. Oh! where is the spirit of the Lord? where is the Lord God of Elijah? It would be a rich mercy to see a day of his power when people are made willing.

3. A spirit of adoption, of grace and supplication stirred up. When God prepares the heart, it is a sign he will cause his ear to hear; Psal. x. 17. A spirit of sloth in this respect is a sad token of God’s anger and absence; Isa. lxiv. 7.

4. A penitent reforming spirit. This was a token of good to Israel, Hag. i. 14, also to Nineveh, Jonah iii. 8. An unmanageable, unframeable spirit in a people, portends greater blows, Amos iv. 11. 12. And in our own individual cases, let us be earnest with God for sanctifying grace, which is a singular token of his special favour, and a sign the second death shall not have power over us, Rev. xx. 6. His Spirit being in us is a sign of our interest in him, and resurrection with him, Rom. viii. 9, 11. Let us beg of him direction; some token for a way-mark to keep in God’s way, the King of heaven’s high road to the new Jerusalem, for this is a covenant mercy, Isa.

* De Probatione Spiritus.

xlvi. 17. Let us beg a special pledge for our protection and preservation, so far as is consistent with his heavenly pleasure, to be a mourner's mark in an evil day, Ezek. ix. 4. Let us beg of God some token of his affection for our satisfaction, some incomes of his grace, and sealings of his Spirit, which may be a blessed earnest of our future happiness, Eph. i. 13, 14. The earnest is part of the payment, so these comforts of grace are grapes of Canaan, morsels of the upper table, preludes and foretastes of eternal enjoyments. Suppose we were all malefactors, and the king offers a sealed pardon, and withal declares, that such as have not the great seal to shew, must suffer at the next assizes; but such as have, must be received to favour, and honoured. The case is ours: O with what running, seeking, using friends, begging, enduring difficulties and trials, should we be content, that we may have a sealed evidence of the King of heaven's favour. Let the mocking Michals, and scoffing Ishmaels of the world say what they please, it is worth seeking, striving for, prizing and admiring: when God saith, "Seek my face," why should not our souls echo, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek," Psal. xxvii. 8.

This is the design of the small Treatise now put into your hands; and O that God would accompany our endeavours with his blessing, and second our preaching and printing, to begin and complete the great match between Jesus Christ and poor sinners; he hath drawn up the articles, and proposed them to you by us, his holy words speak his willingness, these want nothing now but your consent, and the match is made. O sinners, we bring you letters of love and kindness from our beloved, we shew you his excellency, we disclose the large dowry he offers you, the fair house you shall dwell in with him, the pains he hath taken for you; whether all this will prevail we cannot tell, but if this be the last sentence I must write, or you read, I do by these presents summon you to answer this address before the dread tribunal of the great Judge at the last day, when this amongst other witnesses shall stand on record against you. If you entertain not this our gospel, and be not found in God's favour, ministers that warned you, at that day must say, Amen to your just condemnation. But we would rather present you

as chaste virgins to Christ, as accepted of God and approved of men.

It is our work to preach and write, yours to hear and read, and God's work to give success; we therefore follow these poor endeavours with our prayers to the Father of spirits, for converting and confirming grace, that thou Reader mayest increase in favour with God and man, as our Saviour did, that we may at last give up our account with joy, and not with grief, and that those who sow, and those who reap, may rejoice together; which is the earnest prayer of,

Thy soul's friend,

OLIVER HEYWOOD.

November 9th. 1678.

LIFE IN GOD'S FAVOUR.

PSALM XXX. 5.

———*In his favour is life.*

CHAP. I.

INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS.

THE title of this psalm is, “A psalm and song, at the dedication of the house of David.” What this dedication means, or with what ceremonies it was performed, or what house it was that was dedicated, I shall not decide; or to what time it refers, whether his first inhabiting of his house, or re-possession after Absalom’s defiling it, I shall not here determine. The psalm itself may well be called, A divine miscellany of christian experiences; I shall enumerate a few of them.

1. David’s exalting God in praises, who had elevated him in mercy, verse 1, “I will extol thee, O Lord, for thou hast lifted me up.” A good man advanced by God, will highly advance God: the higher our state is, the more elevated must be our praises: when God magnifies us, the more we should glorify God. This is a Christian’s duty and practice.

2. David’s cry, and God’s gracious assistance, verse

2, "I have cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me." Cheap medicine! it was but a mournful complaint, and God came with a healing hand. God is a ready and successful physician. Pardoning grace healed his soul; a merciful providence healed his body, estate, and name.

3. David's resurrection from the grave, and preservation from the pit, verse 3: he was at the grave's mouth, or in a grave of banishment, but brought back; and as to soul-terrors, near the pit of hell by despair or temptations, but prevented.* The grave of temporal afflictions, and the pit of eternal torments may be waiting for the saints, and they may be wonderfully snatched out of both. How oft is there but a step betwixt them and death really, and in their apprehension?

4. David's warm heart in God's praises, wherein he not only employs himself, but all God's people to help him in praising God, verse 4, "Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of his." A praying soul will be a praising soul; the more God's people pray, the more occasion have they for praise, and an individual believer cannot lift up God's praise high enough, a concert is fittest in this music: hence heaven is the proper place of praise, where that blessed choir of saints and angels will for ever echo forth God's glory. Holy souls are only fit to celebrate the memory of his holiness.

5. David's tasting both wrath and love in a short space, verse 5, "His anger is but a moment," that is, endureth for a short space, but there are quick returns of favour. Wrath is wont to come before love, death precedes life, a storm before a calm; a strong wind, earthquake, and fire go before the still small voice;† the

* Sepulchrum, fovea, vel infernum.

† 1 Kings xix. 11, 12.

law before the gospel ; John the Baptist before our Saviour, that God's children may by a night of darkness be prepared for, and learn to prize a morning of light.

6. David's carnal confidence in a prosperous state, verse 6, "In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved," that is, thus I talked with myself when I was in abundance, health, and quietness. O deceitful heart ! A healthful man thinks not of sickness.* God built him a house, he builds himself a castle, but it is in the air. A deceitful heart allures a good man into a fool's paradise. When things go well, security kills us ; when God shines in his transfiguring mount, we will build tabernacles, but observe it, this is David's mount which stood through God's favour.

7. David's sudden reverse, verse 7, "Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled." Self-mounted, soon dismounted, when a frown came into God's brow, it soured all my pleasure. The turning away of God's face overturns the soul's hopes and joys, God's hand is at the foot of our mountain, and if his countenance frown, and he withdraw his supporting hand, our mount falls into the valley of discouragement, if not despair ; we are mere dependents.

8. David's importunate expostulation, verse 8—10, "I cried to thee O Lord :"—How often do God's children, like our volatile children, change their note, alter their tune ? Singing and sighing are near neighbours. They say the limner can with one dash of his pencil turn a laughing into a weeping face : thus doth God ; David was erewhile so full of joy that he calls all the saints to help him in praise, now he musters up all his energies to complain, pray, and expostulate. Prayer is the language of grief, as praise is of joy.

9. David's comfortable transition, verse 11, his

* *In abundantia tranquillitatis.*

mourning is turned into dancing, sackcloth into gladness; a sudden and wonderful change, bitter turned into sweet, darkness into light, hell into heaven. O what can God do, and what strange effects doth heart-joy produce! The man that was grovelling upon the earth is now raised up, and exults in the sprightly movements of a cheerful dance,* as one set at liberty out of the restraint and darkness of a troublesome prison, he puts off his filthy rags, or rather, strait and coarse coat of sackcloth, and is clothed with the robe of righteousness, and garments of salvation. O what a metamorphosis!

10. David's due sense of God's chief end and design in all this, verse 12, "To the end that my glory may sing praise to thee." His glory is the best thing he hath, his tongue, say some, his soul, say others; I say both soul and body must join to celebrate God's praises. Nor shall we repent of sounding God's praise: the more we praise God, the more occasions of praise God will minister to us "But I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more."

Thus much for the context. In all this we may discern what ups and downs God's servants are subject to in this weary world, like a seaman's tossing, or a traveller's road that lies up hill and down. And what variety of affections are excited upon several occasions in the hearts of God's children, joy and sorrow, fear and boldness, desire and aversion, take their turns, and act their several parts in a Christian's breast.

But to come to the words, in which we have night and day, thunder and lightning, the dark and the bright side of a Christian's cloud, law and gospel, wrath and love set opposite to each other, and compared, wherein consider:—

* In chorum, i. e. gaudium solenne intimum ac maximum.

First, How the words are introduced.

Secondly, Wherein the comparison lies.

1. The words come in as a satisfying answer to a tacit objection thus formed : Alas, saith the gracious soul, how should I help in this blessed duty of praise, as is required, verse 4, for alas ! I feel God's anger upon me, I lie under tokens of displeasure, how can I sing and give thanks ?

(1.) He answers this by a concession, be it so, yet it is fit there should be an interchanging succession of joy and sorrow, as of day and night.

(2.) Sorrow like an unwelcome guest will lodge all night, but a blessed morning is coming, which will dispel the thick clouds of a sad night.

(3.) It is but a short night, his anger endureth but a moment, it is but short, though sharp ; it will not be always, nor long.

(4.) It is worth waiting for, his favour will recompense poor afflicted expectants, for in his favour is life.

2. The comparison lies, betwixt God's wrath and his favour, in reference to the nature and duration of both.

(1). In the nature, properties, and effects. God's wrath begets night, that is, sorrow, sadness ; for night in scripture oft imports sorrow. How can the afflicted soul refrain from weeping sore in the night,* when the sun of righteousness is withdrawn. If the wrath of a king be as messengers of death, surely God's wrath must be death to the soul ; but now in God's favour there is life ; a man, a believer lives by the bright shining of God's face.

(2.) They are compared in their duration. God's wrath is but for a moment, for a night, that is, there

* Lam. i. 2.

is a season of God's frowning and scourging, which at longest can only endure, with respect to God's people, the term of their natural life; whilst his favour continues not only as long as natural life, but runs parallel with the life of the soul and line of eternity.

This former part of the verse appears intricate, because brief and concise, the latter part seems an illustration thereof by an excellent rhetorical allusion. *His anger*, his rod or whip; for when God is angry he inflicts punishment; anger is short, indignation more severe, yet both do not reach hatred. God's anger is manifested by its effects; when he scourgeth, as men do when angry, it is the fruit of vindictive or punitive justice, for he is not angry as men are.

But the words lie thus, *a moment in his anger*,* it is only momentary; *in his favour life*, his love is lasting, yea, everlasting: so life is opposed to a moment. The sense of the words is this: although for our sins God may sometimes be angry with us, yet in due time he manifests his good pleasure, which calls us back from death to life, wherein otherwise we should die with horror and despair here, and eternal shame and confusion hereafter.

Some indeed read the words thus,† making life refer to the former sentence, and his favour to the latter, *life* or lives, that is, the longest, sweetest life of men is *a moment in his anger*, or is momentary; in his good will, that is, when his favour sweetly breathes on us, weeping may lodge with us in the night, but joy comes in the morning. The former part is parallel to that complaint in Psal. xxxix. 5, "Behold, thou hast made my days as a hand-breadth." And that expression is like it, Psal. xc. 5, "For all our days are passed away in thy wrath." But the reading which we have

* Momentum in irâ suâ. † Vid. Mr. Pool's Syn. Critic. in loc.

in our Bibles is generally preferred for several good reasons. I shall wave further explication, and also raising observations, and propose this as the doctrine to be treated of in the words of the text, which is an entire proposition, that, "In God's favour is life."

There is life in God's love, or God's love is a Christian's life.

It is a scripture truth asserted by David here, being inspired by the Holy Ghost; and Moses saith the same, Deut. xxx. 20, "For he is thy life, and the length of thy days," that is, not formally, but effectively, by mentioning the effect, he is the cause of thy life, or herein consisteth thy life to obey and enjoy him.

In prosecution of this doctrine I shall confine myself to the following inquiries:—

1. What this favour of God is, and what this life?
 2. In what respect God's favour is life?
 3. To whom, and in what seasons it is life?
 4. Why God's people account his favour life?
- And so come to an application.

CHAP. II.

ON THE FAVOUR OF GOD AND THE LIFE WHICH IT COMPRISES OR PRODUCES.

I. WE are to inquire, what is God's favour? and what is life? I shall put both these together, and so explain the terms briefly.

The word in the first language signifies, will, good

will, good pleasure ;* Deut. xxxiii. 23, "O Naphtali, satisfied with favour, full with the blessing of the Lord." The latter sentence explains the former; when God is pleased to bless persons, they have his favour, and it is that which will satisfy them. It also signifies acceptance, Isa. lx. 7, "They shall come up with acceptance," or *favour*, or *good will*,† "on mine altar." It is the same word as here. Once more, sometimes our English version renders it desire, Psal. cxlv. 19, "He will fulfil the desire," *good will*, "of them that fear him." But as applied here to God, it imports God's great regard for his creatures, and it is fourfold.

1. God's favour is his goodness in the ordinary course of his providence towards all, even to the worst of men, Isa. xxvi. 10, "Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness." And this is our natural life, both as to the origin and maintaining of it, good and bad have their dependence upon God's providence; for he holdeth our soul in life, Psal. lxvi. 9. God doth not do as workmen that make an artificial engine, and set it a-going, and so leave it to itself, but his favour preserves our being and well-being; Job x. 12, "Thou hast granted me life and favour, and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit." By favour is meant either that life is a favour, or that beneficence whereby we are supplied with all needful accommodations. The heathens knew this,‡ and their poets sung it, as Paul quotes Aratus and others, Acts xvii. 28, "For we are also his offspring." So that the stoutest champion and proudest emperor on earth depend upon God's favour and courtesy, whether they shall live another moment; so Daniel informs a

* Voluntas, benevolentia, beneplacitum. † Ad beneplacitum.

‡ Vid. Pool's Syn. Critic. in loc.

mighty monarch, chap. v. 23, "God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways." O that all men did but live under a sense of this great truth, that in God's favour is their life.

2. By God's favour are meant some signal acts of discriminating Providence. Thus God shewed favour to Israel his peculiar people, Psal. xlv. 2, 3, God drove out the heathen, that is, the seven nations of Canaan, and planted his people in their room. Why did he so? The Psalmist answers, "not by their sword or arms, but" positively, "by thy right hand and thine arm, because thou hadst a favour unto them." God's favour was their armour and artillery, this produced weapons for them, both offensive and defensive: hence Psal. v. 12, "For thou Lord wilt bless the righteous, with favour wilt thou compass* him as with a shield." This produceth our comfortable, safe, happy life, which is emphatically called *life*: so 1 Sam. xxv. 6, "Thus shall ye say to him that liveth," that is, that lives prosperously, joyfully, comfortably. And 1 Thess. iii. 8, "Now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord," that is, we live a life of joy; for as Rebecca said of her sad and sorrowful life, Gen. xxvii. 46, "I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth, if Jacob take such an one, what good shall my life do me?" For a life of sorrows is a dying life, scarce worth the name of life in the account of one bitter in soul. But now God's favour produceth deliverances, comfortable provisions, resurrection from death to life, and all accommodations. Thus God raised Hezekiah from a mortal disease, thus he lighted David's candle,† and thus he prevents a thousand dangers, and loads us with multitudes of blessings, whereby our lives are rendered comfortable. And what is the ground of all this? why, God's favour.

* *Coronabo eum. Heb. crown.* † Isa. xxxviii. Psal. xviii. 28.

Consult Psal. xci. 4, 14—16. Psal. lxxxv. 1—3. O consider this, it is by God's favour that our life is not a hell, but so near akin to paradise.

3. By God's favour, the scripture often means the special fruits of God's distinguishing grace, vouchsafed to his own children, and to none else. Psalm cvi. 4, "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour of thy people;" that is, the favour thou bearest to thy people, as our translation explains it: then it follows, "O visit me with thy salvation." This is peculiar grace flowing from the spring of everlasting love, producing all the streams that feed spiritual life in the soul. From the fountain of God's favour flows converting grace, which puts a seed of spiritual life into the heart, whereby we live unto God, 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. It is the favour of benevolence, whereby God first makes us his people, 1 Sam. xii. 22. It is the favour of complacency, whereby God takes delight in his people, Zeph. iii. 17, and here originate all the precious fruits of gospel grace, the giving of his Son,* the preaching of the gospel, the sanctification of souls, their justification, their communion with God, and eternal salvation. All the privileges that saints enjoy on this side heaven, and in heaven, proceed from the favour of God, and so God's favour is our life spiritual and eternal, yea, a living faith, and the life of faith is God's gift, and a fruit of this favour.† This is life eternal begun, this indeed is a life worthy of being called life, without which we are but dead men morally, and must die eternally. But the good will or favour of God gives such water to his saints, as shall be in them a well of water springing up to everlasting life, John iv. 14. No wonder then if David so earnestly desires this favour of God, without which he was not a saint, nor accepted: Psal.

* John iii. 16.

† Eph. ii. 8. John xvii. 3.

cxix. 132, "Look thou upon me," that is, with a propitious, favourable aspect, "and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name." All have mercies, but all have not tender mercies, of which David makes great account : * this distinguishing kindness and especial favour create a spiritual life.

4. There is one thing more which this favour imports, namely, the sense and feeling of this favour of God in the soul, produced by a delightful and satisfying manifestation of it to the soul. This David intends, Psalm cxix. 58, "I entreated thy favour† with my whole heart," that is, David longs not only for the fruits of God's favour in his soul, but the shining of God's face upon him, the sweet assurance of God's special love : Psalm xxxi. 16, "Make thy face to shine upon thy servant," which elsewhere is called the beauty of the Lord. ‡ This David makes the reason of that one thing begged, that he might dwell in God's house ; and all God's servants have sought for it, and looked upon it as their life, light, help, and health. Psalm lxxx. 3, "Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved." And Psalm lxvii. 1, 2, "God be merciful to us, and bless us, and cause his face to shine upon us, that thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations." It is an expression borrowed from men, that when they are well pleased with their friends, they look cheerfully upon them, which begets joy and comfort in their drooping acquaintance : Prov. xvi. 15, "In the light of the king's countenance is life, and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain." Even so when God beholds his children with a cheerful countenance, it animates, exhilarates, and revives their drooping spirits. So

* Psalm lxix. 16. † *Heb.* face. ‡ Psalm xc. 16, 17. xxvii. 4.

saith David, Psalm iv. 6, 7, “ Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us : thou hast put gladness in my heart more than in the time that their corn and wine increased.” David opposeth God’s favour to the vast multitudes of his enemies, and instead of armies, he begs God’s favour may be lifted up on his soul as a banner, for so the words import ; as if he had said, men have their friends and confederates to be kind auxiliaries to them, but I desire no other comfort than thy favour for me,* and the sense and assurance of thy love to me ; shew that thou hast a regard for me, and the brightness of thy smiling face will scatter mine enemies as a mist, or at least dispel those black clouds that sit upon my benighted spirit, and will bring day-light. O the joy that this creates ! not in face, but in heart, true, full, intimate, and satisfying : this is the only reviving *aqua vitæ* to the fainting spirits, that fetcheth a soul from death to life ; the storms of God’s wrath kill the soul’s comfort, and nip the buds of our hopes, but the sweet beams of divine love in the spring-time of God’s gracious return, put life into the disconsolate soul ; even as a child is thunderstruck by his angry Father’s frowns, but revived by friendly, affectionate smiles. This favour of God begets another life of divine joy, pleasure, and satisfaction : this is the life of heaven, a feeding upon the grapes of Canaan ; this is a blessed paradise, a little corner in the heavenly Jerusalem ; this is with the beloved disciple to lie on Jesus’ bosom ; this is to have the joys of his salvation. It is true, this is not every one’s privilege, but sometimes God doth graciously indulge his servants with the comfort of these sensible foretastes of heaven. When that eminent Scotch divine, Mr. Robert Bruce, in his dying moments, was asked by his friends

* Attolle in vexillum lucem vultus tui.

how it was with him, he answered, "When I was young I was diligent, and lived by faith in the Son of God; but now I am old, and not able to do much, yet he condescends to feed me with sensible enjoyments." And indeed this kind of life is, as it were, a kind of life of spiritual sense: Psalm lxxxix. 15—17, "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance.—In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted.—For thou art the glory of their strength: and in thy favour our horn shall be exalted." These two things, I suppose, are meant in this text, namely, the favour of distinguishing mercy which begets spiritual life in real saints, and the favour of God manifested to the soul, which creates a comfortable, joyful life: both these David intends here, especially the latter. If you ask further, whose favour this is in which is life? I answer, the favour of all the persons in the sacred Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost: you have them all mentioned in the valedictory benediction prescribed for the Priests, Numb. vi. 24—26. *The Lord bless thee and keep thee*: "Let God the Father, the fountain of blessings, the preserver of his creatures, bless thee with spiritual blessings, give thee grace, and preserve it in thee." *The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee*: "Let God the Son, the Sun of Righteousness irradiate thy soul with beams of gospel light and love, and shine into thy heart with the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."* *The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace*: "Let the good Spirit of God the Comforter bring the report of God's love to thee, make thy calling and election sure, apply to thee

* 2 Cor. iv. 6.

redeeming grace, and give thee the comfort thereof." The apostle expresses himself thus: "The peace of God that passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus; and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all. Amen."* This New Testament benediction answers to that in the Old, and both imply the peculiar blessings proper to these persons of the Trinity, and which are distributed to God's people. Yet withal we must take that rule which divines have laid down, that the works of the Trinity *ad extra*, with respect to things without, are undivided, and common to all the persons of the Trinity;† because the essence is common to all the persons, so are essential works. Hence creation is ascribed to the Son, redemption to the Father, sanctification both to Father and Son, as well as to the Holy Ghost. Hence divines lay down another rule, that one and the same operation in reference to the creature, in different respects may be either personal or essential; so Christ's incarnation inchoatively is an essential operation common to the Trinity, but terminatively, it is the personal operation of the Son alone. But how we may conceive of God in worship, or how to expect good from the persons of the Trinity, I shall say no more; but refer you to that choice man of God, and great instrument of good, Mr. Durham, in his Exposition of Revel. on ch. i. fol. 9—20.

One thing more I must add, that there is no saving favour shown by God to men, but only through Jesus Christ the sole mediator of the covenant. It is only by Christ that God is reconciled to sinners, Christ is the

* Phil. iv. 7. 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

† Opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa, seu omnibus personis communia.

great propitiation by whom an atonement is made : * God is through his sufferings and intercession pacified, and now at last shews himself friendly and favourable to believing souls ; for he saith, “ This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”—Matt. iii. 17. In whom, not only with his person, actings, sufferings, but through him, with all that come to God by him ; Eph. i. 6, “ To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted, or acceptable, in the beloved,” that is, in Jesus Christ the Son of his love. Never did one stream of grace issue out for sinners since the fall, but in this channel ; never did any beam of God’s favour savingly enlighten, enliven, or rejoice a believer’s heart, but in the face of Jesus Christ. Man having lost God’s favour by the fall, he will not act propitiously towards him again or receive him into favour, but in this gospel way of atonement.

CHAP. III.

THE FAVOUR OF GOD CONSIDERED AS LIFE.

II. How is the favour of God said to be life ? As his favour and life have been already described, I proceed to observe, that his favour is

The cause, the object, the rule, and the end of life.

1. God’s favour is the cause of life ; for “ every good thing comes down from the Father of lights.”—James i. 17. Every good gift of nature, accomplishment or accommodation, owns God’s favour for its author, and every perfect gift of special grace, comfort

* 2 Cor. v. 18. Col. i. 20, 21. Rom. iii. 25.

or glory is the blessed product of divine distinguishing love: grace and peace proceed from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus*—grace to make us good, and peace in the sense and feeling of this good; grace to make our souls acceptable to God, peace whereby we may be comfortable in ourselves. See this fully in Psalm xxxvi. 8, 9, “They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house, and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures.” Why so? “For with thee is the fountain of life.” Natural, spiritual, joyful, eternal life, all that is connected with our being or well-being is in God as in a fountain, whence the streams flow; for this fatness of God’s house, and river of pleasure is nothing else but the sense of God’s love, which depends on God as the author, “in whose presence is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore.”—Ps. xvi. 11.

2. God’s face or favour is the object of life, and indeed thus becomes the cause; the sight of God in Christ is the soul’s spiritual life. “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.”—John xvii. 3. By faith a soul sees him that is invisible, and faith is the soul’s life, the just live by faith.† All our present life of comfort consists in viewing the light of God’s countenance. When God hides his face poor David is troubled, Psalm xxx. 7; but when God shews his reconciled face, the drooping soul, like the sun-flower, begins to open, cheer, and revive. O the comfort this sight of God’s face and favour creates in the soul! And indeed heaven is nothing else but the beatific vision, or the seeing of God’s blessed countenance. When the heavenly courtiers get into the chamber of presence, and behold the King of Heaven’s face, they

* 1 Cor. i. 3.

† Heb. xi. 27. Hab. ii. 4.

shall need no more to complete their happiness. So Scripture testifies, Psalm xvii. 15. 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

3. God's favour is the rule of life, especially of a Christian's life.* A real saint acts according to this, squares his joys, sorrows, cares, fears, desires, delights, according to the sense or manifestations of God's favour, or his withdrawing from the soul: if the King smile he is cheered, if he frown he is cast down. So David expresses himself, "He hideth his face, I am troubled:" but Acts ii. 28, "Thou wilt make me full of joy with thy countenance." This is the regulator of a Christian's actions, duties, and graces, for God's favour influences all, actuates all. Nay, further, God's providential favour is the rule and measure of the natural life of creatures, Psalm civ. 29, "Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled, thou takest away their breath, they die and return to their dust."

4. But especially God's favour is the end of life; the destined end of all creatures' lives and actions is God's pleasure, Rev. iv. 11. They are subordinate to his will: Rom. xi. 36, "For of him, and through him, and to him are all things." All the creatures tend to God, as the lines to the centre; but as all a man's labours in his calling tend to uphold a frail natural life, so all a Christian's undertakings are for this, to maintain or obtain God's favour; his attending on God's ordinances is for this, Psalm xxvii. 4, "To behold the beauty of the Lord; "to see his power and glory in the sanctuary," Psalm lxiii. 1, 2. Why so? why, ver. 3, he saith, "Because thy loving-kindness is better than life:" my life is in it, but that is not all, for it is better than the life I live, my life would do me no good

* He dares do nothing but must have God's favour upon him therein. See Exod. xxxiii. 13, 16. Psalm xc. 16, 17. So it is his rule.

without it, therefore I would travel far to gain it. When the church had lost the sense of God's favour, see what pains she takes, Cant. iii. 1—5. She seeks him upon her bed, then she riseth, goeth about the city in the streets and broad ways, public and private ordinances, then inquires of the watchmen, faithful ministers. At another time, her soul failed when the sense of his favour was withdrawn, and she bids them tell him, by earnest prayer for her, that she was sick of love, she was fainting away.* Oh! what would the gracious soul do, be, endure, or lose, in order to enjoy God's favour. Why doth he pray, read, obey, give, but that he may comply with God's mind, and please the Lord. He would rather have God's favour than the favour of all the world besides. But more of this hereafter.

CHAP. IV.

THE DESCRIPTION OF PERSONS TO WHOM THE FAVOUR OF GOD IS LIFE, AND THE SEASONS IN WHICH THEIR EXPERIENCE CONFIRMS THIS TRUTH.

III. To whom, and at what times and seasons is God's favour life? I may say as to the preservation of natural life, God's providential favour is necessary every moment; but here I speak of God's special favour to the souls of his people, and of the manifestation thereof. Now there are some special seasons wherein persons lie under a strong conviction and impression that in God's favour is life. It is true, a

* Cant. v. 6—8.

Christian ought to lie, and will lie under a conviction, that in God's favour is life, both in religious duties and solemn ordinances, in the enjoyment of creature comforts and friendly relations. But I shall pass these, and pitch upon the following seasons, namely,

On first conversion,—in returning after backslidings,—in an afflicted state,—and on near approaches of death.

1. Young converts on the soul's first change and conversion to God, feel that his favour is life, and that in four respects.

(1.) In discovering God's way to the troubled soul. As soon as the secure sinner is pricked at the heart, and thoroughly awakened, he begins to cry out with the Jews and the jailor, "Men and brethren, what shall we do? Sirs, what shall I do to be saved?"* I want a friendly guide to set me into the right way, I have lost myself, and know not what to do, or which way to go; I have been so used to wander, that I know not which way to steer my course; I am now set fast, and see that if I step forward in my old track I am undone, another way I must take, and which way I cannot tell; my soul with weeping inquires the way to Zion; to heaven I would go, but know not the path.† For God's sake, ye ministers of Christ, give me your best advice what I must do; and O that God would favour me so much in this howling wilderness as to direct me in the right way to a city of habitation.‡ I have gone astray like a lost sheep upon the mountains of sin and error, and the way of peace I have not known; O that the Lord would make all his promises good to my soul for counsel and direction. Now God's favour in this work of guidance is expressed in such promises as these, which the bewildered soul must

* Acts ii. 37. xvi. 30.

† Jer. l. 4, 5.

‡ Psal. cvii. 6, 7.

make grounds of encouragement and matter of prayer : Psal. xxxii. 8. Isa. xxx. 21. xxxv. 8. xlviii. 17. Psal. xxv. 12, 14. Isa. xlii. 16. Luke i. 79.

(2.) A convinced sinner wants God's favour, and esteems it his life. If the Lord would give him a penitent heart, a heart to turn from all sin to God, he would be thankful, knowing that repentance is God's gift.* The poor soul is convinced of its necessity, difficulty, yea, its own inability to turn itself, and cries out, Lord, thou hast commanded me to turn myself, but that must be only to use the means wherein thou hast appointed me to obtain conversion, for thou art solely the proper efficient cause of this great work. Alas! I can no more convert myself than I can create myself; I cannot make one hair white or black, much less make my heart new or holy: this perfect gift comes from the Father of lights, and is a blessed effect of sovereign grace. Alas! though I see my way chalked out I cannot walk in it, I have a rebellious will; Lord, I fear thou hast not given me a heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear unto this day.† Now Lord fully awake me, thoroughly change me, renew my soul. O what a favour would I take a mourning, a repenting heart to be. I see the word will not do it; the rod will not do it; I have been "as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, turn thou me, and I shall be turned;"‡ and when I am savingly turned, I shall kindly repent: and I am the more encouraged to desire and ask this favour, because thou hast graciously made these precious promises—Deut. xxx. 6. Jer. xxiv. 7. Ezek. xi. 19. xxxvi. 25, 26.

(3.) He wants an interest in Jesus Christ. The poor convinced sinner sees nothing in the whole world that can do him any good; and as for his own righte-

* 2 Tim. ii. 25.

† Deut. xxix. 4.

‡ Jer. xxxi. 18, 19.

ousness, alas it is but as filthy rags, that rather defile than justify him;* and thus he cries out, Lord, now at last I see my own nakedness and wretchedness, I abhor myself, and all I am and have, therefore thou mayest justly abhor me;† I must have a righteousness better than my own to justify me; as for my own, the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it, and the covering narrower than that a man can wrap himself in it.‡ When I think of my past wicked life, and this wicked heart within me, and God's strict justice against sinners, and that I have nothing to screen and shelter me from it, I then say with David, "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"|| But I hear good news of a Saviour who is become a surety, an advocate, a propitiatory sacrifice for sinners:§ O that God would give me Christ! O for an interest in his Son! None but Christ, none but Christ, what would I give for him? Lord, shew me this favour, and I will ask nothing else; if I had Christ, I shall have enough, but how shall I come by him? only by believing, receiving the favour is the condition of receiving benefit by the favour. O but faith is the gift of God;¶ I cannot believe, my unbelief kills me; I sometimes think I will embrace Christ, but I want arms; I would run and come to him, but I want feet; I cannot reach him, many things beat me off my hold of him, I am not able to believe; the Spirit hath fully convinced me of my unbelief, hath broken down all my own faith, and told me I must have another manner of faith, even the faith of God's elect, an unfeigned faith, for without

* Isaiah lxiv. 6.

† Horreo quicquid de meo est.—*Luth.*

‡ Isaiah xxviii. 20.

|| Psalm cxxx. 3.

§ Heb. vii. 22. 1 John ii. 2. Rom. iii. 25.

¶ John i. 12. Eph. ii. 8.

such a faith, no Christ, without Christ, no hope of pardon, or heaven. O that God would graciously work this work of faith with power,* it is only an almighty power that can do it. O Lord, draw my unbelieving heart to thee with the attractive beams of thy favour and grace. I adhere to these promises for thy grace in this case, Jer. xxxi. 33. Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27. John vi. 37, 40, 44, 45. Rom. viii. 32.

(4.) One thing more a penitent wants of God on his first return to him, which is a favourable entertainment, a kind reception of the soul into favour. O! this would be worth all the world. Here the poor returning prodigal is at a loss, and dares not approach, but being conscious to himself of many misdemeanours, trembles to draw near to so glorious and dreadful a Majesty; with the publican he stands afar off, smiting his breast, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner;"† or with the prodigal, when returned to himself, his language on approaching God is, O Lord, guilt appals me, wrath alarms me, Satan and my own misgiving heart would drive me from thee, but the sense of my necessity puts me on to look for a remedy, and there is no help but in thyself; but how can such a wretch expect any relief from provoked Majesty? "I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son, yet make me as one of thy hired servants;"‡ let me but be taken into thy favour and family, and I am well pleased, though I be thrust down into the lowest place and office. O! what shall I say? Is there yet any mercy for a poor sinner? Will God ever look towards a rebel? Shall I ever obtain favour in his eyes? There is yet a possibility, there is yet room for a may be; it may be I shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger, it may be the Lord

* Eph. i. 19, 20.

† Luke xviii. 13.

‡ Luke xv. 17—19.

will be gracious to me; who knoweth but God will return to me in mercy? yea, who can tell but he will return and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that I perish not? * who can tell but that God hath thus long kept me out of hell that he may at last do my soul good, and bring me to heaven? Christ died for sinners, I am a sinner, he hath even had mercy on great sinners, Manasseh, Mary Magdalene, and Saul obtained mercy, † as patterns of future grace to others, I am much tossed betwixt hopes and fears, and cannot tell how it will be; if I look at myself I see nothing but grounds of despair, for I have grievously sinned; to me belongeth confusion of face, but to the Lord my God belong mercies and forgivenesses. ‡ Here is all my hope, this is the only ground of my expectation. And is there any hope for a forlorn wretch? O! the very possibility of obtaining his favour, raiseth my soul into an extacy, the least hint of hope is worth a world. But will God be pacified towards me? Is not this too good news to be true? Have I any warrant from God for this hope? O yes, I read in the scriptures of truth, abundance of gracious promises, upon which I will venture my soul's everlasting state, and while I have a word of promise from heaven to secure God's favour and pardon to a penitent sinner, I cannot, I must not consider it presumption to entertain hope. The promises are these, Isa. lv. 7, 8. Jer. xxxi. 34. Isa. xliii. 25. xlv. 22. Psal. xxv. 11. Luke xxiv. 46, 47. Matt. xi. 28. Acts x. 43. xiii. 38, 39. Rom. iv. 5—7. Titus iii. 5.—

2. I proceed to another class of persons and seasons wherein God's children feel the truth of this text, "That in God's favour is life;" and that is returning

* Zeph. ii. 3. Amos v. 15. Joel ii. 14. Jonah iii. 9.

† 1 Tim. i. 15, 16.

‡ Dan. ix. 8, 9.

backsliders, when the souls of God's children have fallen into acts of open scandalous sinning, or a secret course of remissness, unwatchfulness, and decays of grace; in such a day God usually hides his face from the soul, and leaves it in a woful plight, under a measure of desertion, and alas the soul is now under a convincing sense of the importance of God's favour in four respects :—

(1.) The poor backsliding soul wants and longs for a gracious reception into God's favour again. Ah! saith the poor humbled penitent, my case is sad and desperate; when I first entered into covenant with God, I promised constancy, I said, "Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord, in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten;"* but alas, how soon have I forgotten it! how soon have I forsaken the Lord! how quickly am I turned aside after vain things that cannot profit! woe is me, ungrateful wretch that I am! my unkind dealing with God is unparalleled! who ever returned unto folly as I have done? O my wanderings from God! my guilty conscience accuseth me, God frowns on me, all my former sins stare me in the face, even the sins of my unregeneracy; I may even question, whether ever there was a saving change, for did ever any of God's children go on at this rate? surely my spot is not their spot? May not such a backslider in heart and life expect to be filled with his own ways? Am I not bordering upon the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost? Seeing I have been once enlightened, and now fallen away at this rate, is it possible that ever I should be renewed again to repentance? may I not rather fearfully look for fiery indignation,† than a gracious acceptance into favour? yet, if my sin have not reached to that degree, of this I am sure, it hath been

* Jer. l. 5.

† Heb. vi. 4. x. 27.

fearfully aggravated by light and love received, by frequent relapses, striving of the Spirit, and conscience resisted and stifled, which makes my very heart ache, and fills my face with shame and blushing, so that I am not able to look up; I have no ground to expect God's favour, as I cannot expect such favour from men; but what saith God? I will study and plead these encouraging texts, Jer. xxxi. 12, 14. Hos. xi. 7—9. xiv. 4.

(2.) The backsliding soul wants God's favour for reviving the dying graces of the spiritual life. Alas! saith the Christian, by my carelessness or sinning I have not only lost God's favour, but have defaced his image in my soul, I feel sensible decays of grace, my faith flags, my love cools, my repentance is arrested, all the springs seem to be dried up, or the streams run faintly, the fire of grace is buried under the ashes of sloth or corruption, and I would fain have stirred up the gift of God in me, but I cannot, I see it will not be, all my rubbing will not fetch heat into my benumbed joints, my heart is smitten and withered as grass,* nothing but a shower of God's grace, and the sunshine of his countenance can again renew the face of my soul. In the spring I see the Lord alone renew the face of the earth;† O that he would renew his work in my heart, and cause the fruits of righteousness again to bud forth. By idleness of the hands the house droppeth through, by my carelessness and sloth I have made wounds in my conscience, and by the same opening by which sin hath come in, grace hath gone out, and now God's wrath drops into my heart, and follows me. O that God would again recruit his own work in my heart, which is almost dwindled away to nothing! O that his Spirit would restore my decaying graces, and

* Psal. cii. 4.

† Psal. civ. 30.

revive my drooping heart ! Do, O Lord, according to thy word, and remember for me these quickening promises, Hos. vi. 3. xiv. 6—8. Isa. xxxv. 1—4. xliv. 3, 4.

(3.) The troubled backslider wants peace and comfort. O, saith he, for a sense of God's favour again; alas, this I have lost, my soul is far off from peace, I forget prosperity,* yea, for peace I have great bitterness, and when comfort is offered, my soul refuseth to be comforted. I even remember God, and am troubled, reflecting what joys I have had, which are now lost, and questioning my interest in him; will the Lord cast off for ever? will he be favourable no more?† O what a long while it is since I saw his blessed face! his visits are grown very rare, there is a great and sad strangeness between God and my soul. Alas, what shall I do to recover his smiles? I am sensible now and then of his quickening presence, but his comforting presence is utterly gone; I must justify God, and condemn myself; though he should banish me from his blessed presence for ever, yet is there not hope in Israel concerning this thing? May I believe that God will return? O it would be delightful to behold the light of his countenance! to feel those joys that once I had, but now have lost! O that it were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me! when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness!‡ Lord, restore unto me the joy of thy salvation,|| hide not thy face from me. "Lord, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me?"§ what would my soul give for one of thy wonted smiles? shall I never regain the sense of thy favour? wilt thou suffer thy

* Lam. iii. 17.

† Psal. lxxvii. 2—10.

‡ Job xxix. 2, 3.

|| Psal. li. 12.

§ Psal. lxxxviii. 14.

child to pine away in disconsolateness for want of his Father's love? O that I might again lie in that blessed bosom! how well shall it be with me upon my return to my first husband!* Lord, remember these words of promise to thy servant, on which thou hast caused me to trust; Isa. lvii. 16—19. liv. 6—8, 13. xxxii. 16, 17. lxvi. 12—14. 2 Cor. vii. 6.

(4.) All this will not fully content the returning backslider, without God's favour to secure him from falling for time to come. Alas, saith the restored wanderer, I have a backsliding heart, and though I be brought back now, I shall again go astray, without new supplies of assisting grace: I feel my heart declining, and it will return unto folly after peace spoken,† unless God speak an effecting as well as commanding word,—"Go thy way and sin no more." God's special favour must maintain this work fresh in my heart: "Turn us again, and cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved, so will not we go back from thee. Quicken us, and we will call upon thy name."—Psalm lxxx. 3, 7, 18, 19. Lord, unless the Sun of Righteousness keep still shining on me, and elevating me, I shall fall to the earth like a mere vapour or exhalation; if thy favour put not thy right hand under me, I fall and break my bones, dishonour thy name, undo my soul, and never recover. Fain would I hold out, O suffer me not to fall or fail; crown thy grace in me with perseverance, for suffering and perseverance must be the bottom and top of all graces, or they are counterfeit; I have many enemies within and without, I discern how apt I am to fall upon a very slight occasion, I have had too long experience of this treacherous spirit, and I dare not trust it, but I dare trust thee to keep that which concerns thee in me.‡ Establish me, strengthen and set-

* Hos. ii. 7.

† Psalm lxxxv. 8.

‡ Psalm cxxxviii. 8.

tle my soul : * thou hast by thy favour set my feet on the Rock that is higher than I, O keep me there, my mountain may soon be removed, but maintain me upon thy mountain, till I come to the mount of God. If God be my defence, I shall not be greatly moved, yea, I shall get strength that I shall not be moved at all. † I beg no more than what I have under thy hand in a promise : Psalm i. 3. xxxvii. 23, 24. cxii. 6, 7. Isaiah xli. 17. liv. 10. Jer. xxxii. 38—40. Hos. ii. 19, 20. Phil. i. 6.

3. Another season in which God's favour is valued by his people as life, is, when they are under some pressing, harassing affliction; then they feel a necessity of God's favour. Now these afflictions are of two sorts : first, outward ; secondly, inward. A hint of both.

(1.) In outward troubles relative to temporal circumstances, God's favour is precious as life itself. Suppose a Christian be poor, and hath little or nothing to betake himself to, even then he may make a shift to live upon God's favour : as the good woman said, "I have many a time made a good meal of a promise, when I have not had a morsel of meat in the house." And indeed the godly poor have a double advantage : first, to live by faith ; secondly, to enjoy God's peculiar patronage, Psalm cxl. 12. Prov. xxii. 22, 23. We use to say, he is rich, whom God loves ; and it is true, for our livelihood consists in God's favour—a little will go far when we have God's favour with it. A saint is not content merely to have God's leave to use the creatures, but his love therewith. Lord, saith the soul, I have little in the world, but let me have thee, thy grace in my heart, thy blessing with what I have, and I have more than worldly rich men ; though I be poor in the world, let me be heir of thy kingdom. ‡ So,

* 1 Pet. v. 10.

† Psalm lxii. 6.

‡ James ii. 5.

(2.) In the troubles that affect our good name: the poor soul saith, Alas, I see I have lost the favour of men, they reproach me, they are a terror to me, but be not thou, O Lord, a terror to me, thou art my only hope; men set themselves against me, be thou for me, then may I bid defiance to all the world; thy approbation is a sufficient fence against all men's censures.* Let men report what they will of me, let me have a good report of the truth, and I shall less matter men's verdict; but if I be reproached for Christ, I look upon that as a singular favour from God, and honour to me: the reproach of Christ is my riches.—Heb. xi. 26. 1 Pet. iv. 14. Acts v. 41. Isa. li. 7, 12, 13.

(3.) In bodily pains. When the Christian lies sick, or pained upon his bed, among all the visiters that manifest favour to him, he would have the Lord's company, and the Lord doth condescend to come to him, and not only visit him and speak to him, but puts his arm under him, and strengthens him upon his bed of languishing, yea, he tarries with him, and morning and evening makes his bed for him, Psalm xli. 3. O happy favourite of heaven that is thus attended! such a person knows, that if God sees good, he will favour him with removal from his bed, and his love bring him out of the pit, Isa. xxxviii. 17.

(4.) In relative troubles. Alas, saith the Christian, my relations are not only poor, but profane, yea, the greatest enemies I have in my religious course, and that Scripture is fulfilled, "A man's enemies are the men of his own house;" in this case, "I will look unto the Lord," Mic. vii. 5—7. I am content to venture to lose, and even actually to lose, the favour of brother, sister, father, mother, to gain and maintain the favour of God, and when all is gone I do not repent the bargain, I

* Jer. xvii. 17, 18. xx. 10—12.

have made a saving resolution, I am an infinite gainer. But how sad will it be to lose men's favour for appearing religious, and not being so? If you ask for what end, and upon what account, a Christian would have the sense of God's favour? I might shew this largely, by proving that affliction would be sweetened, coming to him as a token of special love from God as his Friend and Father; though it be a bitter pill, yet if it be sweetened with God's favour, the Christian's stomach will not rise against it, but take it cheerfully; if God send it in favour, he tastes honey upon the rod; the best fruit grows upon this tree. A father will correct his children in love, therefore in wisdom, in pity, in due measure, for a short season, for their good to take away sin, and fit them for heaven; therefore the rod is adopted to be as a genuine offspring of the covenant of God's grace, Psalm lxxxix. 32, 33. O, saith the soul, if I can but see God's heart towards me when his hand is on me, I am very well satisfied; let him wound me, so it be a wound of a friend; let him cut me, so he will cure me; let him do what he pleaseth with me, so he will but discover favour to me: and all this God promiseth.—Heb. xii. 8—10. Isa. xxvii. 8, 9. Jer. xlvi. 28. Prov. iii. 12. Isa. lxiii. 9. Zech. xiii. 9. Rom. v. 3—5.

Secondly, So for spiritual troubles which arise,

(1.) From the guilt of sin. O, saith the soul, what shall I do? whithersoever I go my sin always is before me, sin is upon me; ah, what can a guilty malefactor desire, but the Judge's favour? this God promiseth, and Christ purchaseth, as has been shown: see also, Exod. xxxiv. 6—8. Job xxxiii. 26—28. Mic. vii. 18.

(2.) From God's displeasure; in this case, when the poor soul feels God's anger, the only remedy is God's favour. O that God would remove from me the stroke

of his hand, Psalm xxxix. 10. Lord, rebuke me not in anger, I cannot bear thy displeasure, it is a death to me, but in thy favour is life.

(3.) The corruptions of the heart are a heavy affliction to a pious man, and make him bow down heavily, crying out with Paul, "Oh wretched man that I am!" these sons of Zeruiah are too hard for me, these Canaanites are thorns in my eyes, these mother's children put me to hard servitude, and what is the remedy? nothing but God's favour to mortify corruption, according to the promise of his word, Rom. vi. 14, "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace." O, saith the soul, that the Lord would come with succour and relief to my crying, bleeding heart, and rescue me from these intestine foes; what a favour should I look upon it!

(4.) The temptations of Satan cost the troubled heart many throes and pangs, that are ready to overpower it and lead it captive. When shall it once be, saith the Christian, that the God of grace will tread Satan under my feet? Rom. xvi. 20. Many a time my soul prays against these messengers of Satan:* O that at last his grace might be sufficient for me to vanquish them, or to maintain the conflict:† Lord, I beg thy favour against the roaring lion, he terrifies me, do thou interpose powerfully, or at least fortify me against these his fiery darts: gracious Lord Jesus, thou wast tempted to be able or qualified to succour such as were tempted,‡ thou seest how I am hurried and harassed, Lord, thy favour only will set me at liberty.

4. The last description of persons to whom God's favour is life, are dying persons; at the approach of the king of terrors, when flesh and heart fail, then it is time for the believer to look after God as the strength

* 2 Cor. xii. 7—9.

† 1 Cor. x. 13.

‡ Heb. ii. 18.

of his heart, and his portion for ever. * It is true, he hath chosen God's favour before, but now he feels it more sensibly to be his life in these four respects:—

(1.) To satisfy him respecting the safety of his state. The poor Christian hath been often doubting and disputing his interest in Christ and title to heaven, but now he cries out, Alas! what shall I say or do? my soul is in a dangerous state, I am passing into another world, and I know not whither; I am at great uncertainties about eternity, it is a great journey, the matter is of infinite concernment, heaven or hell, salvation or damnation depends upon it; the guilt of many sins comes fresh into my remembrance, I am doubtful of the genuineness of my repentance, my heart is very deceitful, the work is difficult, there are many mistakes, it is easy to miscarry, thousands are shipwrecked unawares. Shall I say with that dying emperor,† Oh my poor wandering, trembling, fluttering soul, whither art thou going? thou must converse no more with men, nor jest it out as thou wast wont: oh, whither art thou going? Or shall I say with another, I have lived anxiously, and die doubtfully.‡ Alas, I am afraid to go out of the world, not knowing whether God be my friend or my enemy; oh for a sense of reconciliation! Now the fruits of God's favour to my soul would be worth all the world; if God would smile upon my soul in Christ, I should not be ashamed to live, because I have a good conscience, nor afraid to die, because I have a good God to go to. Let me have faith, that I may die in the faith; || let me live in the Lord, that I may die in the Lord,§ so I shall be happy

* Psalm lxxiii. 26.

† *Animula vagula, blandula, qui nunc abibis in loca, &c.*

‡ *Anxius vixi, dubius morior.*

|| Heb. xi. 13.

§ Rev. xiv. 13.

with the Lord for ever. One smile, O Lord, vouchsafe to me, a cluster of the grapes of Canaan, a foretaste of heaven before I go hence, for I cannot live, and I dare not die without thy favour and the sense of it.

(2.) To take away the sting and fear of death. God's favour and the sense of it will alone remove fears from the soul, going to conflict with the king of terrors. Death is indeed terrible in itself, and often presents itself in a formidable shape, and when it looks so ghastly, the poor Christian is affrighted, unless the Lord look cheerfully upon him. Now he thus expresseth himself: Lord, sin brought death into the world, his voracious jaws swallow up all mankind, and I am going the way of all the earth, I see his pale face, I feel his fangs fastening on me, the graves are ready for me, but God's smiles will dismay death, and put this tyrant out of countenance, God's favour will remove obscurity from my eyes, and open for me a prospect into eternity; and O how happy is it to look above the grave to God, and beyond death at heaven! My Lord Jesus tasted death, and thereby conquered death, and wrested its destructive weapons out of its hands, destroying him that had the power of death which is the devil; and so delivering them, who through fear of death, were all their life time subject to bondage;* hence the christian champion under a sense of God's favour and Christ's conquest may triumph over death, and say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"† O that my soul could see my Saviour laid before me in the grave, perfuming it for me, preparing me for it, bidding me follow him who broke the ice, and drunk of the brook in the way, surely I would then follow my Captain without fear, I should shoot this gulf without danger, and say with David, "Though

* Heb. ii. 14, 15.

† 1 Cor. xv. 55, 56.

I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." Psal. xxiii. 4.

(3.) To receive the soul immediately upon dissolution; this must be by God's favour, for the soul cannot enter into heaven without God's leave and approbation; they must be special favourites that are admitted into his presence chamber. It is true we cannot expect that peculiar privilege, which the good thief upon the cross had, to whom Christ said, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise."* That audible encouragement was a peculiar dispensation, yet God speaks satisfactorily in scripture promises, and the soul's faith therein may produce that blessed result, Psal. xlix. 15, "God shall redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for he shall receive me," that is, receive me by his special favour into safety. O with what comfort might I look through death, when I see the crown in my Saviour's hand ready to be set upon my head as a conqueror, when the blessed Jesus will put the palms of victory into my hand, and place my immortal soul among the spirits of just men made perfect, with what confidence may I commend my soul into his hands, and trust him that he will keep that which I have committed to him until that day.† Lord, now shine upon this soul of mine that is taking its long leave of the body, send a guard of angels to be its convoy through the devil's territories into the heaven of heavens, and lay it soft and secure in Abraham's bosom.‡ The rich man's pompous funeral is an insignificant ceremony compared with this transportation; let what will become of my body, if only my soul be safely lodged with God; then would I desire to be dissolved, that I might be with Christ; then would my soul take the wings of a dove,

* Luke xxiii. 43. † Psal. xxxi. 5. 2 Tim. i. 12. ‡ Luke xvi. 22.

and fly away above the reach of hellish fiends,* or raging lusts; Lord, grant me thy favour.

(4.) The expiring Christian wants the sense of God's special favour, that he may lie down in hopes of a blessed resurrection. When the soul, the better part, is thus secured, he then takes thought for the case, the body; this goodly fabric must be taken down, I must be unclothed; this frail, tender piece is now dissolving, must be turned to dust and rottenness, and shall be a companion to worms and corruption; well, I am content, but let my soul have a sense of God's favour, and I may be well assured my body shall sleep in Jesus, as redeemed dust which shall be gathered up at the last day; and O what a blessed meeting shall there be of soul and body! what a lovely reuniting of this glorious pair, the soul descending with its triumphant Lord in the air, where Satan shall be dispossessed of his regency, and the body raised up out of the grave by the power of Christ's resurrection, both for ever to be with the Lord;† O blessed day, soul and body married together, never to part more, both solemnly married to the Lord. Here our souls are espoused, there presented to Christ as chaste virgins;‡ O happy soul, O resplendent body, which shall shine forth in glory, activity, spirituality, brilliance, and immortality,|| there my body shall need neither food nor physic, nor sleep, nor marriage, but I shall be as one of the angels of God;§ this mean, diseased, distressed body of mine shall be wonderfully changed, that it may be fashioned like to the glorious body of my Lord Jesus;¶ then shall I be set upon a throne among the blessed, to judge degenerate Israel, yea, to judge angels.** O for that

* Phil. i. 21. Psal. lv. 6.

† 1 Thess. iv. 16, 17.

‡ 2 Cor. xi. 2.

|| 1 Cor. xv. 42—44.

§ Matt. xxii. 30.

¶ Phil. iii. 21.

** Matt. xix. 28.

1 Cor. vi. 3.

day, that blessed day of refreshment that comes from the presence of the Lord,* what then will it be worth to have the favour of the Judge? no matter then who be friends, or who enemies, if I may have Christ on my side, blessed be God I have now a friend in the court, Jesus Christ my Saviour, my advocate, he it is that then shall be Judge, who will own his members, and not forget his brethren, but will proclaim that joyful welcome into his Father's kingdom, "Come ye blessed of my Father,"† come up hither, and sit with me in my throne, even as I overcame and sat with my Father in his throne,‡ welcome my dear saints, ye have been faithful to death, I will also give you a crown of life; you owned me on earth, I will also own you in heaven; you chose my favour above the world, you shall have my favour, and not the world; you shall be placed on my right hand, but others on my left; you were once in favour with me, and you are now in favour, and shall continue so for ever; come into my everlasting embraces, this is the state I purchased for you, promised to you, these are the mansions I went before to prepare for you, || this is the kingdom which I told you, it was your Father's good pleasure to give unto you, it is God's gift,§ not your desert, it is the fruit of God's favour, not your labour. I know it, Lord, I know it, saith the soul, this could not be from my earning, for it is by grace and mere favour that I am what I am, and what can such a one deserve; therefore am I now seeking thy favour, now at the last struggle, that I may lie down in my grave in peace, sleep in the dust as on a bed of spices, and rise with thy saints into glory. ¶ In the mean time being fortified with thy favour, I can bid adieu to this weary

* Acts iii. 19.

† Matt. xxv. 34.

‡ Rev. iii. 21.

|| John. xiv. 2.

§ Luke xii. 32. Rom. vi. 23.

¶ Isa. lvii. 2.

world, welcome death, hope for life, and therefore my heart is glad, my glory rejoiceth, my flesh also shall rest in hope,* “For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though, after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another: though my reins be consumed within me.” Job xix. 25—27.

CHAP. V.

OF WHAT NATURE THAT LIFE IS WHICH PROCEEDS FROM THE FAVOUR OF GOD.

THERE is one thing more in the doctrinal part of this subject, of which I shall briefly speak, before I proceed to the application, which is, the reason why a Christian's life is in God's favour: to illustrate and confirm this point, I may shew,

First, What life proceeds from God's favour.

Secondly, Why saints esteem God's favour to be their life.

First, What is the nature of that life which is in God's favour? Besides what was spoken in explication of a natural, comfortable, and spiritually joyful life, all which depend on God's favour; I shall more particularly open a fourfold life of the Christian, which is contained in, and flows from the favour of God, namely,

A life of justification, sanctification, covenant supplies, and glory.

* Psal. xvi. 9, 10.

1. Of justification; a justified state is life. As a man condemned is dead legally, so pardon brings him a new life in a legal sense; thus the just shall live by faith, Rom. i. 17, that is, by applying the righteousness of Christ to sinners by faith, for their justification, which is the gospel way of justification: now this work is of grace and favour, not of debt, Rom. iv. 4. Mere favour that God would appoint and accept satisfaction from the surety, and not demand full payment from the debtor; so that "to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness," Rom. iv. 5. This is the stupendous contrivance of free grace; poor sinners that cannot pay a farthing in order to satisfy justice, yet are reckoned clear upon accepting Christ by faith, and that faith also a free gift, a fruit of covenant grace; here is favour upon favour, favour without witness. Surely, a poor arrested debtor accounts it a great favour, if a friend will be bound for him, much more if he pay the whole debt, most of all, if he furnish him with means to perform the conditions; God hath done all this for believers. O what astonishing mercy is this! what an admirable contrivance of grace! God just still, the law in force still, sin hateful, the poor soul sinning, and can do nothing to satisfy, yet accepted as righteous in God's sight, as if he had fully answered the demands of the law. This is the proper result produced by infinite grace and wisdom.

2. A life of sanctification originates in divine favour. This in scripture is called life also, Gal. ii. 20, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me," by his image, and his Spirit working in my heart, bringing forth vital acts, eternal life within, and a spiritual grace without, in holy performances and new obedience; all this is from covenant love, and favour as scripture assures

us,* God's favour is the proper cause of the being of grace, "it gives grace and renders souls acceptable."† Grace were not grace, if not freely given. Paul saith, "By the grace of God I am what I am," 1 Cor. xv. 10. It is God's favour that draws out the habits of grace into exercise; "For," saith our Saviour, "without me you can do nothing, John xv. 5, and "it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do," Phil. ii. 13. All that spring of grace in the heart, and those rivers of living waters which flow from believers, proceed from covenant favour, John vii. 38. The very God of peace must sanctify wholly, and he alone fills with fruits of righteousness, he gives progress in sanctification, power to perform religious duties, and fresh assistance for new undertakings.‡ Let none say we deny holiness, because we exclude it a place in a sinner's justification, for these are inseparable companions; we allow it the place which scripture assigns it, though we dare not put it into the room of Christ's blood, it is certain where Christ is a Saviour he will be a sovereign, his benefits and his person cannot be divided, the virtue of his death and resurrection, goes along with their value; newness of life and heart is as necessary in its place, as freedom from wrath and condemnation. Now Christ is made sanctification as well as righteousness;|| and no question but a sincere saint pursues after holiness, and blesseth God for knocking off his fetters, as well as paying his debts. Though a prisoner be set at liberty, yet he is not satisfied, unless he have his mortal disease healed. Spiritual health and strength of soul to serve God are unspeakable favours, as well as deliverance from guilt and wrath; God is the author,

* Jer. xxxi. 33. Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.

† Gratia gratiam dans, et gratiam faciens.

‡ 1 Thess. v. 23. Col. i. 10. || Rom. viii. 1, 2. 1 Cor. i. 30.

and Christ the purchaser, while a believing soul is the possessor of both.

3. A life of covenant supply is from God's favour. God's blessing makes our comforts effectual to attain the end designed in their use ; for "man lives not by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord."—Deut. viii. 3. Alas, how can dead things preserve life in us ? God's blessing is the staff of our bread, the support of our lives, and the ground of all our hopes ; what have we to depend upon but this ? But that which we mean here is covenant supply, by virtue of a promise, and when all things come as tokens of God's favour. Phil. iv. 19, "My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." O blessed word !

(1.) "My God."

(2.) "Riches in glory," or glorious riches.

(3.) "By Christ Jesus."

No wonder now if wants be supplied, all wants of soul and body, and that in a covenant way. It is an admirable text, hath much marrow in it, which an active faith will fetch out. The word of God is full of expressions to this purpose, that there is no want to them that fear him, and that God gives the desire of the saint's heart.* Nor do these come as common mercies, but as tokens of special favour ; hence Jer. xxxii. 41, "Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart, and with my whole soul." Here is favour with favour. Sometimes God gives gifts, that may in a sort be called giftless, when he gives not himself or his special love, so he gave Israel quails in wrath ;† for it is one thing for God to give a mercy,

* Psal. xxxiv. 9, 10. xxxvii. 3, 4, 11, 22, 26. lxxxiv. 11, 12. cxxviii. 1, 2. cxxxi. 15. Matt. vi. 33. † Psal. lxxviii. 29, 31.

and another to give in mercy ; but a child of God hath his mercies in mercy, as tokens and testimonies of special favour, which adds an accent and emphasis to every mercy, and makes it come doubly laden with peculiar interest ; shall I call it double guilt ? Nay, it is gold throughout as Xenophon relates of Cyrus's gifts, he gave a cup of gold to Artabanus, and a kiss to Chrysantas, the former complained that his cup was not such good gold as the other's kiss, because the latter was a sign of special favour. So truly, God's favour to his people hath more real worth in it, than wicked men's golden comforts which are but gilded outsides of empty boxes, but every comfort a Christian hath is full charged with blessing, and whatever it be in point of quantity, yet in point of quality it is like Benjamin's mess, five times larger than the men of the world's.

4. A life of glory and salvation doth proceed from God's favour : John x. 28, " I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish." So that this eternal life in heaven, which only deserves the name of life, is God's special gift, the gift of his favour and peculiar love, Rom. vi. 23. God freely gave Christ, Christ freely gave himself for us, and accordingly God gives eternal life to all his members. * It was dear to Christ, but free to us ; the manner of God's procuring it for us, and conveying it to us, is something wonderful indeed, yet doth not lessen, but rather augments the favour, as so much must be done and suffered, which makes it so costly a thing to bring our souls to heaven. Well may we write this word *favour* in capital letters upon all the steps we take towards glory, and upon every link of that golden chain that draws us from earth to

* John iii. 16. Heb. ix. 15. 2 Tim. i. 10. 1 Pet. i. 3, 4. Tit. iii. 7. 1 John iii. 1, 2.

heaven, from the dungeon of our natural state into the paradise of God's immediate presence. "Thou wilt guide me by thy counsel," saith David, "and afterwards receive me to glory."—Psalm lxxiii. 23, 24. "Fear not little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."—Luke xii. 32. If ever we come to heaven, we must be carried thither in the bosom of God's distinguishing favour; no man that ever entered those pearly gates could say, I have paid a valuable price for this heavenly city. It is an inheritance which comes by favour, not by purchase. Let the proud Papist say, I will not have heaven at free cost, * we, for our parts, must with the four and twenty elders cast down our crowns before the throne, saying, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power."—Rev. iv. 10, 11. v. 12.

Secondly, A word or two may be advanced in answer to the inquiry, Why Christians esteem God's favour to be their life? I shall not need to enlarge here. It may be so,

1. Because they have enlightened minds to see the difference betwixt God and the creature. There is such an excellency in God, and such vanity in the creature, that they must needs think highly of God, and lowly of the world; God is the chief good, others are inferior good, inconsiderable, or false and flattering: a Christian through grace is able to judge of things aright, and as they are. The difference betwixt a pious man's judging, and a sinner's, Dr. Ames sets forth thus: "An infant is much affected with a picture or image of meat and drink, or an apple, or any thing desirable, but a wise man knows how to distinguish betwixt the mere picture and the substance, especially having tasted the goodness of those things." Thus the believing Christian

* *Cœlum gratis non accipiam.*

hath tasted that the Lord is gracious,* and hence longs for more of him, and this is that whereby he lives, so that it is death to be without God or his grace.

2. Because the gracious soul hath a sanctified will and affections. These are changed from what they were originally by nature; the heart by nature savoureth not the things that be of God, but those that be of men;† but a sincere Christian is born from above, and hath a noble principle, a heaven-born soul. Those heavenly courtiers in the palace above, the holy angels and glorified saints, take little notice of crowns, sceptres, mitres, or treasures; one smile of God's face is of more worth than all the monarchies, glittering pageantries, or honours of the earth. So the saints' hearts are transformed into their likeness, have the same grace for quality, though not for quantity, with the saints in heaven, and have the like thoughts (so far as spiritualized) with those above, for they are clothed with the sun, and have the moon under their feet.—Rev. xii. 1.

3. Because the true Christian hath felt the bitterness of sin, and God's displeasure for it, and the impossibility of other things quieting his conscience, without God's favour. A poor guilty malefactor at the bar may have many persuasives to put off his grief, but nothing will tranquilize him, when condemned, but his prince's favour and pardon: just thus it is with the converted sinner, that was lost in himself, and lay under the curse of the law, ‡ dead in himself, || and perceiving that nothing could compose his spirit, and quiet his heart but God's favour in Christ. Tell the guilty conscience of honours, pleasures, or treasures of the world, you sing songs to a heavy heart; these things make the Christian more sad, rather than still

* 1 Peter ii. 3. † Matt. xvi. 23. ‡ Gal. iii. 10. || Rom. vii. 9.

the clamours of conscience : no, no, nothing will serve but God's favour.

4. Because the sincere Christian is a genuine believer, he views things with the eye of faith ; with Paul's perspective, 2 Cor. iv. 18 ; like Moses, Heb. xi. 26, 27. The eye of faith can throw obscurity upon all the world's glory, and lay its honours in the dust : it can draw a veil over the world's painted face, and withdraw the world's veil from before heavenly objects, and represent them in their native lustre. Faith can realize the things of God, and set them off with some advantage to sense : it can overlook present objects, and obtain a view of God's countenance. Faith can take the dimensions of heavenly and earthly things, and engage the soul to a proportionable valuation. A Christian's life is a life of faith, we walk by faith, not by sense : faith quickly discerns how little sense, or objects of sense can help him in straits ; the hope of heavenly things springing from God's favour, must bring him relief, and cheer his drooping spirits : faith fetcheth all down from God to the soul, and accordingly begets a high valuation of his favour as the only source of life. Thus much for the doctrinal part.

CHAP. VI.

INFORMATION DERIVED FROM THE SUBJECT UNDER CONSIDERATION.

THE subsequent particulars may be detailed as conveying information :—

1. It follows that life is a rich mercy. Why so ?

Because it is the proper result of God's favour, "in his favour is life." It is also that good which David takes and makes use of to illustrate and exemplify God's favour: he doth not say in God's favour is wisdom, learning, riches, health or relations, though these are mercies, yet they are but such as are produced under God by the tree of life. Natural life is a foundation-mercy; if life be gone, all the comforts of life cease: hence nature desires a perpetuating of its being, and abhors a dissolution. The devil was orthodox in the doctrine, though perverting it in the use; Job ii. 4, "Skin for skin, all that a man hath will he give for his life." Divines dispute whether a miserable being, or no being be better? It is true, no being is better than a being in misery, in respect of the individual person: hence Christ said of Judas, "It had been better he had never been born:"* but yet in respect of the whole creation, of which this miserable being is a part and branch, and in respect of God's will and glory, such a miserable being is better than none at all; it is a favour from God that we have any being with any mercy attached to it, and we should praise God while he continues it, Psalm civ. 33. A wretched being in the lowest rank of God's creatures, is a favour God doth not owe us, and we owe him praise and service for it.

2. That outward comforts of life are fruits of God's favour. If God's favour is life, it is also our livelihood, it is of the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed, and it is also rich favour that his mercies are new every morning,† even every moment; God's favour is the life of our mercies, and the mercy of our lives; our outward comforts depend on divine pleasure, and God's special favour. When David was blessing God for his

* Mark xiv. 21.

† Lam. iii. 22, 23.

mercies, he saith, Psalm cili. 4, "Who redeemeth thy life from destruction," there is the mercy of life; "who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies," there is favour imparting the supplies of life. And indeed we do not use to make our acknowledgments and express our obligation to the hand that gives, but the mind that inclines the hand to bestow the gift; the favour and good will of the giver is the spring of the benefit: all our supplies come of mere favour, godly and wicked have forfeited them into the hands of justice: Jacob acknowledged he was not worthy of the least of God's mercies,* so may we say; one sin forfeits temporal enjoyments, bless God for their undeserved continuance.

3. It follows, that wicked men have many fruits of God's favour, and we must still distinguish betwixt God's common and his special favour. As to the latter, no man knows either love or hatred by what is before him, for all things come alike to all, Eccles. ix. 1, 2. Riches of themselves do not evidence God's peculiar favour; for both Scripture and experience testify, that the worst of men oftentimes have the greatest share of the best things of this world. By what tenure they possess these things, I shall not dispute, or whether they be properly usurpers of God's creatures; as to true covenant title in Christ they have none, but a right before men they have, and some right in God's sight as from his royal bounty: as thus, suppose a malefactor is condemned to die, the sentence is not executed, in the interval before the execution, he hath bread and water, or something still more nourishing given him to keep him alive till the execution, he hath broken the law, and forfeited his life and livelihood, yet it is the king's pleasure and favour he shall be main-

* Gen. xxxii. 10.

tained, he is no usurper in using that meat ; thus God endureth with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction. *

4. The last inference is this, that God's favour is infinitely better than all worldly enjoyments. There were endless disputes amongst heathen philosophers, to decide wherein consisteth man's chief good ? this text determines the controversy, the chief good of man consists in the favour of God. It seems this was the great inquiry, and a subject of eager investigation in the days of David ; Psalm iv. 6, 7, " There be many that say, who will shew us any good ? " Let David answer the question, he will clearly transfer it from the creature to the Creator : " Who will shew ? " they meant, who among men ? but God alone must answer David's diligent inquiry, let him have a propitious smile from heaven, and he is satisfied ; let others make their best of the world's markets, David looks for his profit from another mart and quarter : God's shining countenance is better to him, than their plentiful harvests of corn and wine, and no wonder if we compare a little, worldly enjoyments with God's favour.

(1.) God's favour is the spring and fountain, the original cause of all favours ; and surely, the cause hath more in it than the effect. God's favour is abundant and plentiful ; hence it is called, " The fountain of living waters." † It is true, the streams of God's favour do run through God's covenant people as their proper channel, yet many rich drops sprinkle over mountains of Gilboa, and the heath of the wilderness ; but these are only drops, crumbs cast to dogs, or showers of outward mercies at the best, while saints lie at the spring-head of grace.

(2.) God's favour alone satisfies a rational soul,

* Rom. ix. 22.

† Jer. ii. 13.

other things cannot; this only brings solid peace and quietness to our minds, and satisfaction to our desires.* God made the soul for himself and it cannot be at rest till it return to God ; Psal. cxvi. 7. Other things are bread which fills not, nay, no bread at all, but he that obtains divine favour may eat that which is good, and his soul shall delight itself in fatness ; Isa. lv. 2. As a natural body out of its place is not at rest, so the soul must enjoy God ; as no quantity of any thing can fill a vessel when its capacity is larger than that quantity, so no earthly thing can fill a heavenly soul, for the soul is more capacious than the world.

(3.) God's favour is spiritual, therefore can extend to souls and spirits, which carnal corporeal objects cannot do, they adhere to the outside, to the members and senses. Hence said that rich man, "Soul, take thine ease, thou hast goods laid up." But what were those goods to his soul ? it was his sensitive, not his rational soul that was the better by them ; there is no proportion betwixt outward things and spiritual faculties, but God's favour in Christ is adequate and suitable to the soul, it can pierce and penetrate through all the senses to the inward man, and there unite itself by intimate conjunction with our minds, for it doth not lightly tickle the outward or inward senses, but even possesseth the soul and spirit. One compares the joy of God's favour to an abundant drenching of the earth with seasonable rain, while favour from the world, resembles a light sprinkling of the earth with an evening dew ; God's favour waters thoroughly, the world's drops are but like the sprinkling of water on the smith's fire, making it burn hotter.

(4.) God's favour is to be desired for itself, as the ultimate object of our desires. Other things are only

* Psalm xxxvi. 8.

desirable for inferior ends in their secondary respective places, as physic to recover health, meat to satisfy hunger, &c. but there is no other end for which God can be rightly desired, except for himself, and all other things in subordination to this end, for all things must be referred to God, as the efficient cause and chief end of all; when a man is travelling, if he be arrested in any part of his way he cannot perfect his journey, or reach to the end thereof; but created things are intended as steps to conduct the Christian forward on his journey.

(5.) God's favour is independent, and needs not to be indebted to the creature, as a means to effect the end; it can satisfy souls immediately, and so indeed it doth those in heaven, for they have neither creature supplies, nor positive institutions, through which God's favour is communicated to them, his blissful presence is their heaven; so it is in this world, God can, and often doth refresh the hearts of his children in the absence of means, not only of creature comforts, but of his own ordinances; a Paul could feel enjoyment,* whether in the body, or out of the body, he could not tell; but however, as it was abstracted from the creature, so it was above the creature to effect.

(6.) God's favour is an infinite good, because it can, at one and the same time, supply all the creatures in heaven and earth, whose necessities are so various;† the sun can only give light to one hemisphere at once, but the sun of God's favour shines through the visible creation into men's souls, and to the saints and angels in heaven in a glorious radiant manner; these live more directly under the benign influences of God's bliss-mak-

* 2 Cor. xii. 2.

† Quod totum omnibus simul communicatum debet esse infinitum.—*Ames. Cat. Sec. 7.*

ing presence, yet we feel the virtue and comfort of it more reflexly through the glass of ordinances. I dispute not whether that which satisfies a soul must needs be infinite, since a soul is but finite ; but this is certain, that which satisfies all souls at once must be infinite.

(7.) God's favour is unmixed, pure, and perfect, there are no dregs in this cup, it is a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal ; Rev. xxii. 1. There is light and no darkness at all,* life and no death, blessing and no curse, fulness of joy and no sorrow,† heaven and no hell ; his blessing makes rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it as to outward comforts ; and for spiritual joys, so far as God's favour shines upon the soul, and is not obstructed and intercepted with the thick mists of sin, fear, or ignorance, there is no defect in it, no sadness attends it, but the spiritual Jews have light and gladness, and joy and honour,‡ while in worldly enjoyments there is not only vanity but vexation.

(8.) God's favour is effectual, it can cure the soul of all its fears, and sad thoughts, and scatter all clouds. Psalm xciv. 19, " In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul." Alas ! the top and cream of worldly joy from outward comforts is soon fleeted, or skimmed off by means of affliction ; when God emptieth from vessel to vessel, he spoils mirth, but his favour can elevate the heart from earth, yea, from hell to heaven ; it can make the Christian bear up against storms in the midst of the most furious encounters, yea, it causeth joy not only in them, but for them. ||

(9.) God's favour may be made sure, but the enjoyments of the world cannot ; all outward comforts are

* 1 John i. 5.

† Psal. xvi. 11.

‡ Esther viii. 16.

|| 2 Cor. xii. 10. James i. 2.

but as liquor in a brittle glass, soon cracked, soon lost. A great man once boasted of three things that he could not lose, his riches, his learning, and the king's favour; but in seeking a blessing on his meat he could not speak sense, he was forced to solicit charity, and before he died, professed, he was sure the king did care more for the worst of his dogs than for him. But God's favour is constant, permanent and everlasting; truth and mercy go hand in hand to all eternity. *

(10.) God's favour always ends well: it begins in good-will, it ends in good-will; it begins in benevolence, it ends in complacency; it begins in grace, it ends in glory; it is so far from ceasing, that it is increasing; it is like Solomon's sun that shines brighter to the perfect day of glory, like Ezekiel's waters that grow deeper till the soul arrive at the unfathomable depth of eternal felicity. But alas! the comforts of this world, if the soul have no interest in God's favour, like the sweet and clear streams of Jordan run down into the dead sea of never-ending, boundless misery.

CHAP. VIII.

TENDENCY OF WHAT HAS BEEN STATED TO PRODUCE CONVICTION.

IN making application of the subject for the purpose of producing conviction both with respect to sinners and saints, I commence with th former.

Is God's favour a Christian's life? Then, O what a fearful case are those in that are not in God's favour?

* Psalm c. 5.

Woe, woe, woe to that soul which is out of God's favour, and continues so, and is found so at death and judgment. O what a sad and deplorable state ! better, ten thousand times better never to have been born. How canst thou live, soul ? how darest thou die ? Who dost thou think will take pity on thee, if God disown thee ? How canst thou make a shift to keep up thy heart from terror ? How canst thou eat and drink, sleep or work, as long as thou art not sure thou art in God's favour ? Or if thou mindest not these things, but puttest off thoughts of soul affairs a while, how canst thou bear up thy head at the approach of death ? Dost thou dream of a reprieve or exemption from it ? or dost thou imagine thou must die like a beast, and so feel neither weal nor woe when life is gone ? or dost thou think to arrive at heaven without God's love or leave ? Canst thou be so sottish as to hope to be happy whether God will or not ? Is not life bound up in, and issuing from God's favour ? I may say to that soul that hath not an interest in God's favour, as the Lord to Abimelech, " Thou art but a dead man. *

1. Thou hast no true spiritual life, but art dead in sins and trespasses : † whatever vital acts thou pretendest to, thou hast no more spiritual life in thee than a dead carcass ; though thou mayest have a name to live, thou art dead, ‡ thou art but the picture of a Christian ; adorn a dead corpse, you cannot put life into it, but make it more offensive ; thy graces are but dead graces, thy duties are dead duties, thy gifts, comforts, and acts all are dead, and thy soul a dead soul, ready to be put into the grave of eternal perdition. How canst thou be otherwise than dead, when thou wantest the sun of God's favour to put life into thee ?

* Gen. xx. 3.

† Eph. ii. 1.

‡ Rev. iii. 1.

2. Thou art under the sentence of death which the law has passed upon thee, the gospel declares thee condemned already, thou hast forfeited thy right to all creature comforts, canst not truly call one morsel of bread thine own by a true covenant title, though God in his general bounty casts such crumbs to dogs: and for all thy bearing up so confidently with thy prayers, hearings, and hopings, all is abomination in his sight, nothing thou dost can please God, thou canst find no acceptance with him. Poor soul, thou toilest and trudgest hard to no purpose; if thou be not in favour with God, he will say, who required these things at thy hands? Alas, all thou art or doest is rejected.

3. Thou art every moment exposed to a natural death, thy life hangs in doubt, and depends upon the courtesy of an offended God, who hath thee in his power, and can strike thee dead any moment of thy life: if thou sawest a giant stand over thee with a drawn sword, being thy sworn enemy, and ready to take away thy life, thou wouldest take but little rest in thy bed; God is thine enemy, stronger than all the men on earth, and he is just and true, and hath bound himself by an oath to destroy all the workers of iniquity; he is angry with the wicked every day, if thou turn not, he will whet his sword, he hath bent his bow, and made it ready, he hath prepared for thee the instruments of death, Psalm vii. 11, 12. How canst thou sleep quietly? surely thy pillow is very soft, or thy heart very hard, else thou wouldest never be thus quiet under so much guilt, when thou knowest not that thou shalt live another hour, when thou canst not tell but death may meet thee at thy board, in thy bed, in the field, on the road; God hath the advantage of thee, and can soon hurl thee out of this world into another—a stamp of his foot, a word of his mouth, a

frown of his countenance will do it, for thou must perish at the rebuke of his countenance. How canst thou evade the arrest of his grim sergeant, death? the grave is ready for thee, yield thou must. And,

4. What is worst of all, when thou diest a natural death, thou enterest upon the bitter pangs of eternal death, which consists in a separation of the soul from God, and tormenting pains of soul and body under divine wrath.* Alas, soul! dost thou know what an everlasting banishment from the favourable presence of God means? this the hell of hell, and though here thou canst be content to live without God's favour, yet it will be another manner of thing to be in hell without the benefit of God's favour; here thou mayest be content, there the loss of it will be tormenting, then thine eyes will be opened to see what is in God's favour, to know the worth of it by the want of it. If the withdrawing of the sense God's favour have filled saints' hearts with intolerable pangs, near akin to those of the damned in hell, oh what an inexpressible horror and anguish shall the hearts of the lost feel, when they see all their fond and groundless hopes frustrated, having given up the ghost, and in the room of their self-made comforts, weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth; instead of wine and mirth, sensual delights and pleasures, to drink of the wine of the wrath of God, poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation, where soul and body must be tormented with fire and brimstone, in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb.† Ah, dreadful disappointment! ah, woful state of graceless sinners! poor soul, what a heaviest case art thou in, there is but a step betwixt thee and death, but a hair-breadth betwixt thee and hell, it is but stopping thy borrowed breath, and thou art in

* 2 Thess. i. 7—9.

† Rev. xiv. 10, 11.

endless misery; God hath ways enough to dispatch thee, and Satan, whom thou art serving, is waiting for a commission to seize thee! he pusheth thee forward into sin apace, that thou mayest hasten into the same condemnation with him; God also leaves thee to thyself, and glad thou art of it, that thou canst pass on undisturbed to the pit of destruction. Now, thou canst laugh at death as a fable, slight the thoughts of damnation as unconcerned therein, despise the way of obtaining God's favour as unimportant; thou art now ripening for ruin, sin hath made thee as stubble fully dry, and justice is upon the road to tear thee up, and cast thee into the fire of eternal wrath, and though thou art sleeping upon the bed of carnal security, yet thy judgment of a long time lingereth not, and thy damnation slumbereth not.* Oh couldst thou have a look into hell, and see what is become of those graceless souls that were once as careless and confident as thou art, it would affright thee out of thy wits, or wickedness; and indeed it is a wonder that guilty consciences discovering wrath over them, and hell flaming beneath, do not run mad, and lay violent hands on themselves, like Judas, or at least roar out like tormented fiends as Spira did. I often think of what Augustin said, "I would not for all the world be in an unregenerate state one hour, lest in that hour death should snatch me away, and thrust me into hell." Oh that thy heart, poor sinner, did meditate terror! Oh that the sinners in Zion were but afraid, and would bethink themselves how they are able to dwell with devouring fire, with everlasting burnings!† or rather, that you might inquire some way of escaping that wrath to come, those everlasting torments. But there is no hope, sinners will not fear, till they feel what

* 2 Pet. ii. 3.

† Isa. xxxiii. 14, 18.

God's favour means by the want of it, and what his wrath means by painful experience. It seems it must be the sad fate of poor ministers still to labour in vain, and to cry out, who hath believed our report? * Well, poor sinners will feel what now they will not believe; though we die, yet God's word of threatening will take hold of them; and though now they will not lay it to heart, yet at last they shall consider it perfectly, the time is coming when it shall be known whose words shall stand, God's or theirs; † death and judgment will determine the controversy. You will say, perhaps, why so much said about God's favour? are we not all in God's favour? we hope God will not be so severe as you are: will God disown us? we trust not, God is more merciful than to consign us to misery.

Answer. Do you think all men are in God's special favour? that is contrary to Scripture and reason; or do you think God will cast none into hell for ever? If you will not believe God's word, you shall have your confutation another way, but it shall be a costly conviction. Do I need to tell you again, that God will not be merciful to any wicked transgressors; and that it is a people of no understanding, therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour? That man is in a sad state indeed, who cannot be saved unless God be false to his word, who must be eternally lost if God be true. The Scriptures inform us, that unregenerate, unholy, unconverted sinners cannot be saved, that they are not in God's favour, yet very many hope it may be otherwise, that is, they hope that God is not God; for if he is God, he must be true, righteous, and holy, not indulging men in sin to gratify their lusts, nor yet saving their souls to please their selfish humours. They

* Isa. xlix. 4. liii. 1.

† Zech. i. 5, 6.

will find it fall out far otherwise; be they great or small, they shall find that God will cast them out of his favour if they have slighted his love.

But that I may discuss this conviction more fully, and bring it home to the conscience, I shall speak to four classes of persons: namely,

Presumers, abusers, neglecters, and rejecters of God's favour.

1. Presumers on the favour of God, who imagine they are in God's favour, and yet have no true Scripture warrant for it; for he that hopes without solid ground from the word of God is a presumer, and alas, many do so. Suppose a poor beggar please himself with imagining that such a rich man would give him a thousand pounds, but hath no promise nor encouragement from him of any such kindness, will not all persons laugh him to scorn for such a fond delusion? Was that madman at Athens any richer for claiming every ship that came into harbour for his own? Who so confident as those that have least ground? I have observed the following, palpable differences betwixt a presuming hypocrite, and a true child of God.

(1.) That mere professors of religion are fond of applying God's favour to themselves, but genuine Christians are very jealous, are troubled with many doubts and fears about it, you can hardly persuade them of it; while you cannot keep off the former from grasping at it by misapplication.

(2.) Mere formalists dream of God's favour without the consideration of his justice, truth, and holiness; whereas a penitent child of God is very apt to pass over the thoughts of mercy, being much exercised with dreadful apprehensions of his justice: Alas, saith he, how shall I escape the terrible justice of a sin-avenging God? and he is never quieted till he see how

justice and mercy embrace each other in Christ's mediation.

(3.) Presumptuous nominal Christians run all upon justification by God's grace and favour, but forget sanctification, and their own duty; whereas a gracious soul, longing after holiness in heart and life, is discouraged because so little is visible.

(4.) The poor presuming soul dreams of God's favour absolutely, but studies not gospel conditions, to which God's favour with all the effects thereof are promised; and a pious Christian dares not apply pardon, reconciliation, &c. because he finds not that faith and repentance which he knows God requireth, and to which he annexeth the effects of his special favour in Christ. Oh what damnable delusions are built upon these mistakes! Alas, how many are gulled and beguiled with misinformations and misconstructions in these fundamental cases!

Here I might reckon up the many pleas and pretences men bring to persuade themselves that they are in God's favour, I shall but glance at them, I need not stand to confute them.—One hopes he is in God's favour because he is prospered in the world, as it respects estate, friends, health, and honour; but if so, the Turk can boast of success and favour as much as any.—Another on the contrary thinks he is in God's favour because afflicted, then souls tormented in hell might plead God's favour.—Some plead they hear the best preachers, enjoy pure ordinances, but Christ cashiers those who on this account pleaded his favour, Luke xiii. 26.—Others God hath honoured with notable gifts of discourse, prayer, and knowledge, but Saul and Judas, yea, the devil himself might infer God's favour from gifts with as much reason as they can have.—Some plead a change in their course, and some

visible reformation of life; but this of itself will not evidence God's favour, 2 Peter ii. 20.—Others plead that they are merciful, forgiving, mild to such as offend them, and they hope for favour from God; but Saul was destitute of piety, and out of favour, notwithstanding this good property, 1 Sam. xi. 13. x. 27.—Some think they have God's favour, because they beg it in every undertaking, and would not set about any enterprise without it; but Saul a hypocrite, and at last cast off did as much, 1 Sam. xiii. 12; also if God answered not, he examined the reason to find out the sin that hindered God's favour, 1 Sam. xiv. 37, 38; besides he shewed great dislike to sin, and zeal to punish it, and effect a reformation, ver. 33. 39; he even continued his duties after he heard that God had cast him out of favour, see 1 Sam. xv. 23—31; yet for all this, he was not in God's favour and quite rejected.—Others plead their love to God, and respect for his people, but there is such a love to God and his people as doth not evidence special grace; thus even a Saul, a Balaam, and wicked men may not be altogether void of love to God and his saints.—Some plead convictions of conscience, terrors, fears, humiliations, deep foretastes of another world, which is no more than Ahab, Felix, Judas,* and those described in Heb. vi. 4. 5, could plead.—Others imagine their soundness in the faith, harmless conversation, hearing the word gladly, doing much in compliance therewith, will at least evidence, if not procure God's favour; but the following passages, Rom. ii. 18—24. Phil. iii. 6. Mark vi. 20, will overturn this conceit.—Some will presume to argue themselves into God's favour from their diligence in duties, their inquires after the will of God and salvation, but those mentioned in Isa. lviii. 2, and the young man,

* 1 Kings xxi. 27. Acts xxiv. 25.

Matt. xix. 20, were as fit to plead this as they, yet were not in special favour.—Others hope God favours them because they are much affected under ordinances, enlarged in duties, and continue long in fasting and prayer, but the Pharisees and stony-ground hearers had as much reason to plead in this manner as they, Luke xviii. 11, 12. Matt. xxiii. 14. xiii. 21.—And others can go along with the foolish virgins in having lamps, trimming them, keeping company with wise virgins, desiring grace, using some endeavours to obtain it, yet alas, cast out of the chamber with “I know you not,” Matt. xxv. 2—12.

I say not but these things are good so far as they go, however they are defective in their consequences, and not sufficient evidences of God’s favour, or special love in Christ; you must look out for more satisfying grounds. Observe it, there is nothing wherein persons are more apt to be mistaken, and more endangered by mistaking than imagining they are in God’s favour. Men are apt to flatter themselves with hopes of immunity in sin, from a conceit of the mercy of God, and though they live sinfully, yet they say, “Is not the Lord among us? none evil can come unto us,” Micah iii. 11, 12. Alas, poor sinner, it is not thy confidence, but scriptural evidence that will carry it. It is a sad overwhelming consideration to hear deluded sinners expressing high hopes of God’s favour, but when you examine their reasons, they have not one that will carry water, or have any weight in the balances of the sanctuary. Art thou in God’s favour when thou hast never been sensible of his displeasure, and hast not yet been brought through the pangs of regeneration? Art thou in God’s favour, and canst not produce as evidence a gospel repentance, justifying faith, labour of love, or any one saving grace in sincerity? Canst thou imagine

thou art in God's favour, when thou never didst give up thyself to God in covenant to be ruled by his laws, and comply with his will? Art thou in God's favour that either makest no conscience of worshipping God, or dost it but formally, and knowest not what it is to pour out thy soul before him, or enjoy communion with him? Nay, but, man, how canst thou judge thyself in God's favour, when thy conscience tells thee of a delicious sin in which thou takest pleasure, and with which thou art loth to part, which is totally inconsistent with God's favour? For if thouregardest iniquity in thy heart, God will not hear thy prayer,* nor respect thy person. Men may flatter thee, and say, Peace, peace; good men may be deceived with thee, and approve of thee; thou mayest have quietness in thine own conscience, and sing thyself asleep on the bed of security; but all this while God may thunder out threatenings against thee, and hate thee as his enemy, and cast thy soul into torments for ever. Alas, poor souls, how we poor ministers could weep over you that are enemies to the cross of Christ! O that you did but see your danger before it be too late! O that God in mercy to your souls would deliver you from everlasting burnings!

2. Another class to be reprov'd, are abusers of God's favour. Now men abuse his favour two ways: first, by invalidating it; and secondly, by perverting it.

(1.) By rendering the favour of God null, or ineffectual to accomplish his designs thereby. God's favour should leave a sweet savour upon men's spirits, and lead their souls to him. Rom. ii. 4, "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth to re-

* Psal. lxvi. 18.

pentance?" that is, should lead to repentance and new obedience. Alas, that these silken, silver cords of love and favour, should draw our iron hearts no nearer God!* since God's goodness is such an attractive loadstone, and hath won so many hearts! Alas, sirs, what are you made of? where is your ingenuousness? If men had expressed the thousandth part of favour to you; O what tenderness of heart would it have wrought? and shall God's kindness be lost? will you always go on to receive the grace of God in vain? will you go on to return evil for good, hatred for his good-will? Alas, that you should still depart from your best friend, and forsake your own mercies; you may be sure that the more favours are conferred on you, the more coals of fire are heaped on your heads, if you attain not God's end; besides, you do evidently demonstrate that you are among the wicked; for of them it is said, Isa. xxvi. 10, "Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness." Wilfulness under kindnesses is a black brand of a wicked heart; reprobates are usually hardened by that which softens others; when word, rod, love, light, convictions, and all discussions rather make worse than better, it is fearful. Lord, pity that soul upon which all likely means are lost; cursed ground, which neither shower nor sunshine, human diligence nor heavenly influences make fruitful, in reference to which thou hast said, Lay it waste, throw it to the common with a gospel curse upon it, let no fruit grow on thee henceforth for ever; if after all it bear thorns and briars it is rejected, nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned, Heb. vi. 8.

(2.) By perverting God's favours, and turning them to a wrong use and end. Those are ungodly men that turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, Jude, 4. As

* Hosea xi. 4.

when men do pervert the outward comforts of life, which are God's favours, and use them as provisions for the flesh, weapons of unrighteousness, incentives to sin, and instruments to serve Satan, by gluttony, drunkenness, pride, or lust. Oh how ill doth God take this, yea, the very creature groans under this evil; and the usual fruit thereof is either plucking that person from the world, or pulling that abused mercy out of his hands: see Hos. ii. 8, 9. But oh that God's indulgence should be abused by wretched sinners, as a pillow to lay their heads and sleep upon! yet thus it oft proves: Ecces. viii. 11, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the children of men is fully set in them to do evil." The better God is to them, the worse they will be, desperate antipodes to heavenly bounty, like marshy earth, when the more it is manured the more barren it grows, or a bad soil that produceth weeds instead of herbs under the droppings of heaven. But O what prodigious monsters are those that argue from kindness to self-murdering cruelty, from God's mercy to a lawless liberty to sin, from the abounding of gospel grace to the abounding of iniquity: such diabolical reasoners as these, the apostle Paul repels with an *absit*, "God forbid:"* Rom. vi. 1, 2, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid." Far be that from us to make such a lawless inference; let it never be spoken or done in Christ's school; let no man that pretends to be a saint shew himself so irrational and illogical, as either wilfully to commit a sin in hopes of pardon, as if God's pardons were like the Pope's dispensations to break God's laws, or else to return unto folly after peace spoken, and presume that God is gracious, and will not punish or finally condemn him: it will

* Μὴ γένοιτο.

appear that as God hath favours to bestow, he hath also justice to execute, and when mercy goes off the stage, severity shall enter, and act a dreadful tragedy in reference to the poor sinner ; these favours will be converted into faggots to scorch the sinner in hell for ever ; this sweet oil of love will, when kindled into flame, be like melted lead poured upon his naked soul with addition of multiplied tortures. As the sense of unkindness torments awakened consciences, under great kindnesses, so the fruits of unkindnesses are incensed wrath and indignation ; abused mercy turns into fury ; the more of heaven here, if men are regardless of it, the more of hell hereafter. Justice will be most glorified where grace hath been most magnified and vilified ; if God's justice enter an action against us, the appeal is to God's throne of grace in Christ ; but if grace and love itself commence a suit against us, whither can we flee for relief or remedy ?

3. Among those persons that fall under the lash of conviction may be reckoned neglecters of God's favours, refusers of his kindnesses, that prefer, first, men's favour ; or, secondly, sensual pleasures to the favour of God.

(1.) How many, alas, are there that ambitiously desire the favour of the great men of the world ! many will entreat the favour of the prince, and every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts. This ambitious humour of pleasing men to obtain or maintain their favour and good-will, is a great obstruction to faith, and destruction to sinners : John v. 44, " How can you believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only ? " Sometimes, it seems, men's favour is inconsistent with the favour of God, and true believers find it a hard matter to abandon their credit, or venture upon dis-

grace or the world's disfavour, for Christ; a Moses could do it, but many fail here; it is a very tender point, a man's good name is himself, and what good will his life do him when reputation is gone? How can men live in the world, when out of all men's favour? This is hard to pass, few come to a decision, and say, Lord, let me have thy favour with the forfeiture or loss of all men's favour. But alas, what good will the favour of great men do you in the hour of death, or day of judgment? then the light of their countenance shall be cast down; alas, they cannot relieve their own aching heads or condemned souls; ask them to befriend you, that God may not be angry, see if they can bail you from the arrest of death, or bring you off at the bar of God, yea, try in lesser matters now, make the experiment in your pangs of conscience, or pains of body, and see if their favour or friendship can drive away either; no, alas, they cannot help themselves in these cases, in God's favour alone there is life, yet almost all men slight the favour of God, and make no great reckoning of it. God may reserve his favours for whom he pleaseth, for their parts they stand in need of no such thing in their vain imagination, but when death and judgment come their eyes will be opened, and their hearts roundly convinced of this truth, that "in God's favour is life."

(2.) Many prefer the gratifications of appetite and sensual pleasures, esteeming them more highly than God's favour; they observe lying vanities, and so forsake their own mercies, Jonah ii. 8. Poor wretched, sensual creatures, that matter not God's favour, that is, his special distinguishing kindness and love, if they may enjoy what gratifies the flesh. Alas, can the enjoyment of sensual delights, or worldly profits any way compensate for the loss of God's favour? meats

for the belly, and the belly for meats, but God will destroy both it and them.* Alas, both pleasures and body will be removed in a little time, and all gratifications will vanish away, as if they had never been; but God's favour will endure for ever, yea, will make persons both perfectly and perpetually happy; 1 John ii. 17, "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doth the will of God abideth for ever." Ah, sinner, when thou shalt see those gracious souls that longed, panted, prayed, and endeavoured for the favour of God above their lives, made happy in God's immediate presence, and thy miserable soul (which took the world for its portion, and was well satisfied, if thou hadst so much of the fruits of God's common bounty, as to gratify sense, while thou slightedst God's special favour,) at last banished from his face and favour for ever; oh how will this add new wounds to thy despair, thou wilt be ready thus to bemoan thy soul: Ah wretched creature that I am, woe unto me! time was that God's favour might have been had, Christ procured it, the new covenant contained it, the gospel promised it, ministers offered it, many looked after it, and now possess it in yonder glorious mansions, but I poor careless sinner slighted it, did not judge it worth a sigh, a prayer, or an inquiry for obtaining it, I presumed that I had it, would not be beat off that fond conceit, I judged them fools, or my enemies that would have me question it, or I was taken up with other matters, and was contented with the common enjoyments of this world; but alas, now I see, now at last, now too late, I am forced| to discern both worth and want together; I am now banished from what I slighted, and that punishment of loss of God's favour is both equitable and what might have been expected; woe is

* 1 Cor. vi. 13.

me, I shall never see his reconciled face, my former sensual pleasures are gone, as if they had never been, but the sting still remains and pierces my soul, and will gnaw my conscience for ever. O that I had considered this betimes! O that I had read, and heard, and prayed, and examined conscience, and asked questions for the purpose of discovering my real state, and a way to obtain assurance of God's favour! O that I had wallowed in dust and ashes with a broken heart, and weeping eyes all my days! O that I had made it my business to lay open all my sins by confession, to condemn myself at the bar of justice, and to make a timely appeal to the throne of grace! O that my soul had had a true, lively, saving faith, instead of this fancied faith that now undoeth me, by deceiving me! I thought faith was nothing but a belief that I was in God's favour, that my sins were pardoned, and my soul should be saved, that is, that I must believe a lie; for now I feel by sad experience it was not so, there was no reality in these things. O that I had made diligent inquiry into the nature, properties, and actings of true justifying faith; possibly I might have escaped these torments, and have sat down with yonder blessed souls at God's right hand in his immediate presence! but my day is gone, the gulf is fixed, my hopes are lost, the day of grace is over, my soul is lost, and must for ever, for ever be banished from the presence of the Lord, and punished with everlasting destruction from the powerful hand of a sin-avenging God; this is the dreadful fruit of slighting the special favour of the eternal God. But you will say, are there any such men as slight the favour of God? and who are they? I answer, yes, scripture and experience tell us of many instances; there are but too many Esaus that for a

morsel sell their heavenly birth-right;* the time would fail me to reckon up a cursed Ham, a mocking Ishmael, a stupid Saul, a treacherous Judas, an apostate Julian, and all the rabble of profane wretches that are gone down to hell for slighting the favour of God: and I may say to every graceless sinner, how canst thou escape, that neglectest so great salvation?† Alas, it is plain enough thou dost not mind nor matter this affair; thy language, thy carriage, thy whole conversation declare to thy conscience and others, that thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter:‡ alas, poor creature, where are thy cares, fears, tears, and soul exercises about this business? didst thou ever examine thyself about it? what time dost thou spend daily in seeking God with thy whole heart? how doth it take up thy thoughts, what thou must do if death should arrest thee? art thou at uncertainties in this case? canst thou spend days, and weeks, and months, and years, and never think of this, as though thou wert totally unconcerned in it? does any thing rather than this take up thy mind? the God of heaven pity thee, thy case is sad, thou art out of God's favour. But more of this in another place.

4. The last description of persons that are exposed to reproof, are rejecters of the favour of God; such there are that do not only turn their backs upon the favour of God, but trample the pearls of religion under their feet: these are of two sorts, first, gross offenders; and secondly, hot persecutors.

(1.) Gross sinners, brutish spirits, that like atheists put far off the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near—that lie upon beds of ivory, and eat the lambs out of the flock—that drink wine in bowls||—

* Heb. xii. 16.

† Acts viii. 21.

† Heb. ii. 3.

|| Amos vi. 3—7.

that spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave, yea, to hell, who are these? the text brands them for atheists, therefore they say unto God, "depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways: what is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?"* This is not only the heart and life language, but even the lip language of the atheists of our days: "what matter is it whether people pray or not? for ought we see it goeth as well with such as make no great stir in religion, as those that keep up such a mighty noise; men make more ado than needs; if there be a God, (putting it in doubt as the devil to Eve at first) yet this God hath an equal respect to all his creatures, he is all goodness, and surely would not make creatures to damn them, and it is but a fond thing for men to torment themselves with melancholy conceits of another world, which is uncertain; we know what we are, or have been, but we know not what we shall be hereafter: therefore let us live a merry life, cast away cares, and skim the cream of creature enjoyments; let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die, and there is an end of us." And indeed no wonder such hogs as these live a swinish life, since they have the atheist's belief; and when they are full of the husks of these low creature comforts, no wonder that they lift up their snouts against heaven,† and scorn the dainties of the upper table. I must leave these incarnate devils, (nay, worse than the devil, for he cannot be an atheist, though it is his work to make atheists) to the disappointments they shall meet with, being confident that those that despise divine favour shall feel the anger, and lie under the insupportable displeasure of

* Job xxi. 13—15.

† *Plenus porcorum siliquis non desiderat hanc suavitatem.*

that God, whose friendship they wilfully reject. In the mean time, let those wretched sinners that choose death before life, yea, that practically judge themselves unworthy of God's favour, and of eternal life, consider but that one affecting heart-melting text, Psal. lxxxi. 8—12. See the pathetic oratory God useth to win his people's hearts to him, enumerating his relation to them, promises, former providences, and willingness to do for them as much as they can ask: "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it;" yet after all this, listen to God's complaint, "But my people would not hearken to my voice, Israel would none of me;" as if he had said, alas, my people thought me not worth owning, they supposed my favour would do them no good, I was not at all prized by them, they imagined they could shift well enough without me. The God that made them and upholds them offered them his grace and love, yea, himself to make them happy. But I was rejected, they would have none of me for their husband, Lord, and Saviour, I must leave them unconquered, not prevailing on them that I might do them good, my Spirit must go away grieved from them, it seems they and I must part; well, I will turn them loose, I will leave them to themselves, I have given them over to their own heart's lusts, and now they are filling up the measure of their sins, and when they have come to the height, I will hide my face from them, and take away the hedge of my common providence, and I will see what their end shall be.* It will be seen what poor shift they can make to secure their hearts from terror, and their souls from torments; to whom now will they flee for help, and where will they leave their glory? without me they shall bow down

* Deut. xxxii. 20.

under the prisoners, (chained devils) and they shall fall down under the slain with the rest of lost souls in everlasting confusion.* Oh then there shall be weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, then I will laugh at their calamity, and mock when their fear cometh; then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer, for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord, they would none of my counsel, they despised all my reproof, Prov. i. 24—33; read Jer. xvi. 5, 13, 17, 18.

(2.) There are some so desperate in rejecting God's favour, that they reject all that have it, and like those the worse that are in favour with God; they only consult to cast him down from his excellency,† who is in high favour with God; the more God expresseth his love, the more they express their hatred, as Ishmael did mock Isaac, or as the patriarchs their father's darling Joseph. There is a spirit of envy that swells in the hearts of the wicked against such as are higher in God's books than themselves; what envy wrought in the hearts of the Pharisees against our Saviour, because he said he was the Son of God? what bedlam rage possessed the frantic Jews against Stephen when he said he saw the heavens opened? they cried with a loud voice, stopped their ears, ran upon him like madmen.‡ The like do malignant villains against the saints at this day, if they hear any speak, though with words of truth and soberness, of their experience, interest in God, communion with him, evidences of his special favour, &c. Alas, because these sottish beings relish not these things, though it be in scripture language, and according to the warrant of the word, yet they are ready to mock them, and call them in scorn the godly, holy brethren, or holy sisters; but indeed

* Isa. x. 3, 4.

† Psal. lxii. 4.

‡ Acts vii. 56, 57.

accounting them a pack of canting hypocrites, that are worse than others, because they will needs be better than others, and will take upon them to censure their neighbours, as low, carnal, and wicked, because they talk not at the same rate of high flown nonsense, (as they deem it) with themselves; thus sober gracious Christians are branded as fools, fanatics, enthusiasts, and scoffed at with hellish disdain, as Pharisees, Separatists, or those the prophet speaks of, that say, stand by thyself, come not near to us, for we are holier than thou.* But alas, these wretched adversaries of the truth, know not how to distinguish betwixt an empty ostentation of holiness, and a sober profession of the power of godliness, and so speak evil of the things they know not, and dash themselves upon the rock of persecution, both as to the sin and punishment, undoing themselves for ever. O that men would be wise at last, and not strike at Christ through the loins of his members, nor kick against the pricks. Think with thyself, man, when thou art abusing professors, such a one is either a hypocrite, or a saint; if a hypocrite notwithstanding this fair show, then woe to me that have not gone half this length, never wept and prayed, and lived as he hath done; he hath far out-gone me, and yet he is short of grace and heaven. O then, how far short am I, that am so far short of him? woe is me, I must mend my pace, or I shall come far behind; shall he perish with all those experiences, and what shall become of me that have none at all? I had need give over mocking, and fall a working for my poor soul. Or if he be indeed no hypocrite, but a real saint, (as for ought I know he is, for it is too great a work for me to judge the heart contrary to words or actions) O what a fearful case am I in, who am fighting against God, and

* Isaiah lxx. 5.

scorning those whom God is pleased to own? better a millstone were hanged about my neck, and myself be cast into the depth of the sea.* How dare I look that God in the face whose favourites I have despised? Will not their master take his servants' part? What good can I do in opposing them who are approved by the great God? Let my soul be in their soul's case, both now and at the great day; Lord, have mercy upon my soul, and be favourable to me.

Secondly, I shall now briefly address the children of God, that are indeed really under the cheering beams of divine favour, but are such as deserve reproof also on these four accounts:—

Slighting, doubting, mistaking, and misusing God's favour.

1. Slighting God's favour. Alas, how few of us do esteem God's favour as life? ah, where is a holy David that could say, thy loving-kindness or benignity is better than life? Psalm lxiii. 3. Objects of sense are near us, and usually more affect us, seldom are our hearts taken up with the thoughts of it, or have any endearedness to it. How few of us do stir up ourselves to lay hold upon God, and stimulate our hearts to labour, and lay out ourselves to obtain an assurance in our hearts, that we are indeed in the favour of God? nay, cannot we be often without the feeling of God's favour a long time? at best do we not prize the gift more than the Giver? It is a piece of egregious folly to look at the hand more than the free mind in a gift. Do not outward comforts please us more than the comforts of grace, left-hand more than right-hand blessings? Ah, sirs, are the consolations of God small to you? are you afraid of being happy? Is the favour of men worth seeking, and is God's favour of no value?

* Matt. xviii. 6.

Shall God propound and promise the mercy, shall Christ purchase it, shall the Spirit offer and convey it, yea, assure us of it, and shall we still make light of it? And shall the Lord wait to be gracious, and our hearts be loth to entertain the fruits of his grace? Will not a day come, when we shall have need of the assurance of God's love? Will not slight thoughts of God's favour wound deep at death, or in soul-trouble? Ah, that we could be ashamed of our own egregious folly. O Lord, how lamentable that thy children should prize their Father's smiles no more! What is of worth, of use, if God's favour be not? what can do you good without it? how can you desire to go to heaven, if you desire not that wherein heaven doth consist? Lord, pardon this woful senselessness, ingratitude, and security.

2. Many of God's children are much dispirited, discouraged, and dejected in this case; full of fears, jealousies, and misgivings of heart; when they remember God they are troubled, as David saith, Psalm lxxvii. 3. thinking, oh but this God is none of my God, I have no title to his special favour. How many such poor crest-fallen saints are there, that are ready to groan out their souls in sad complaints, with deserted David? Psalm vii. 8, 9. Hence proceed the soul's sad and slavish fears on approaching God, or rather, when the soul comes not to God: and observe it, the less you come to God, the less willing will you be to come to him; guilt and fears breed strangeness. "Oh, I have conducted myself in such a way that I dare not look God in the face, his justice affrights me, his mercy hath taken its leave of me, my soul is in darkness, and darkness begets terror; I am afraid God will call my sins to remembrance, I have little ground to expect his favour, but rather may fear his frowns, yet dare not

but come though dragged into God's presence, as though he would rather hurt than help this self-condemning spirit." Oh how unbecoming a saint is this uncomfortableness of mind ! where is a sense of God's love, trusting in his mercy, delighting in God, rejoicing in his praise ? Alas, by this means legal terrors prevail instead of evangelical tenderness, a heart full of fears takes the place of a soul full of love: thus true religion degenerates into a spurious servility; instead of amicable approaches to God as a friend, desponding souls are ready to remain at a distance from him, as though he were an enemy, or to imagine by duties they shall bribe or flatter the infinite Majesty to treat them gently. Alas, sirs, this is not that reverence and godly fear of which the Scripture speaks, but a base-born cowardice of spirit, or unbecoming trembling that vents itself in superstition or apostacy ; for either such persons worship God according to their fancies, to please him, and pacify his anger, or quite fall off to atheism, for men will soon leave what they love not ; and if such could cast off this fear, they would cast off this care of religion, but christianity engageth to a fearing of the Lord and his goodness, and approaching to him, and conversing with him from a persuasion of his forgiving grace.* Alas, sirs, is not God infinitely good and gracious ? is not his favour towards them that fear him ? doth not the Lord take pleasure in his people,† and should not his people take pleasure in God ? Is not the joy of the Lord our strength ? doth it become God's own children to serve him grudgingly ? Have we not been undone by our criminal jealousies and unbelief ? The Lord humble us for the peevishness, sourness, and untowardness of our wicked hearts, and help us for the future under a sense of his favour

* Hos. iii. 5. Psalm cxxx. 4.

† Psalm cxlix. 4.

to serve the Lord with gladness, and to come before his presence with singing.*

3. The ground of all this discouragement is mistaking God's favour. Alas, there is much misjudging betwixt man and man, that breeds much unkindness : but oh how sad is it for Christians, God's dear children, to mistake God's dispensations, first, in point of correction ; and secondly, as to evidences of peculiar regard in spiritual things.

(1.) Though God over and over again tell his children, that his heart may be towards them even then when his hand is upon them ; nay, that whom the Lord loves he chasteneth : yet how hard is it for a child of God to read love on the rod, even covenant love and faithfulness ? How few can see divine favour in taking as well as giving a mercy ? Few of us know how to rejoice in God with Habakkuk on the world's disappearing ; † and fewer that can rejoice in tribulation. ‡ But under affliction we cry out of wrath, nothing but wrath,—he comes to call my sins to remembrance, he comes to kill me, this is one of God's arrows of vengeance, now he is beginning his controversy, which will not end till my soul be in hell. When God snatches away child, estate, or name, oh, say you, I am undone, this is a fruit of God's displeasure ; but have you not as good reason to say, O what love is in this stroke ? God is removing my idol of jealousy, this child I prized at too high a rate, it is fit that that should go which interposeth betwixt my affections and God ; I grew extravagant with my estate, or secure, and was saying my mountain stands strong, I shall never be moved ; blessed be God that would not suffer my soul to take any rest in the creature ; O what a mercy is this, that God hath dried up that stream

* Psalm c. 2.

† Hab. iii. 17.

‡ Rom. v. 3.

from which I was in danger of having a surfeit, that I might drink more freely of the fountain of the water of life; it is rich favour that he will take the pains to scourge me, and bring me home by weeping-cross, rather than suffer me to wander from him by waywardness of spirit.—This were indeed becoming a child of God; but how few of God's children thus reason, and how seldom can the best taste honey on the rod of correction?

(2.) The children of God are too apt to mistake the very smiles of God's face, and the true genuine tokens of his favour, though conveyed to them by the hand of the Spirit: surely it is a sad thing to father God's gracious impressions upon the father of lies, as well as to lay the devil's brats at God's door. When God communicates gracious intimations as evidences of his love, it is an unworthy thing to call these delusions, or sparks of our own kindling; this must go to God's heart, he must take it very unkindly. It is true, Satan can transform himself into an angel of light, but the Spirit's sealings carry their own evidence along with them, and the Scripture touch-stone tries both satanical delusions, and the Spirit's manifestations; God's cordials are of another nature, and produce different effects from Satan's kickshaws. O how often, Christian, God hath shone upon thy soul? how sweetly and seasonably have the patents of divine love been confirmed? how many a kind welcome hast thou had from God? what a line of love hath been drawn through all God's conduct towards thee? and yet dost thou question this favour, or believe the infernal spirit rather than the God of truth, or thy undoubted experience? Ah, how unworthy a thing is this? Will a father who hath borne a tender affection for his child, and who daily cares for him, take it well to have

his love questioned by every base whisper of an ill-willed adversary? That is an unhandsome retort, Mal. i. 2, "I have loved you, saith the Lord: yet ye say, wherein hast thou loved us?" they put him to prove his love upon every slight occasion. It is hard when the constant tenour of a husband's carriage towards his wife is full of tenderness, that every seeming slight must be construed as a withdrawment of affection, by a jealous wife. How ill doth God take it when Zion said, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me?" Isa. xlix. 14. And what tender expostulations doth he use to satisfy her, that it is not according to her surmise, vers. 15, 16. Alas, whence comes it to pass, that if evidences be not fairly written and legible, (though our own neglects and miscarriages often blur them) all is lost, the poor Christian questions all? Ah, sirs, may not money be in the sack's mouth, and you not see it? May not the Lord of the land be your dear brother Joseph, though you do not know him? yea, may not he be carrying on designs of love, though you have hard thoughts of him? it may be thy soul is grievously harassed with blasphemous thoughts, which thou hatest as the devil their author; well, must not God be thy friend, because Satan is thy adversary? because the devil doth tempt, doth not God love? Who more favoured of God than Christ, and who more violently assaulted than he? Doth the husband love the wife the less, because she is sorely tempted, but is vexed, tormented, burdened with impetuous solicitations to infidelity: nay, doth he not pity her, and love her the more for her faithfulness. The God of heaven knows and hears thy groans and griefs, prayers and fears, and will both succour and pardon, because he favours thee. Let the devil say what he will, and do what he can, for he is a maker of

differences, and the great tale-bearer to separate very friends. O, but what clear proofs might you produce of divine favour to confute Satan's slanders? You may be assured he is what his word represents him, and not what Satan misrepresents him. Muster up thy experiences, Christian, which have been a lively comment upon the promises, and oppose them to Satan's base insinuations, that from henceforth thou mayest not belie the Lord, nor deny his graces in thy heart, or his special favour to thy soul.

4. Misusing or abusing God's favours and kindnesses, by unthankfulness and unfruitfulness.

(1.) An unthankful heart is the grave of many favours, and shall there be no resurrection of mercies out of those graves? Israel's ingratitude was a prodigy, and Deut. xxxii. is a song to perpetuate the remembrance thereof to all generations; many receipts, no returns. O how astonishing is this? how unsuitable to the ingenuous spirit of a believer? David * could rise at midnight to give thanks, when God's favours came into his mind, and thus he calculates: "Surely the righteous shall give thanks unto thy name," Psalm cxl. 13. Paul was a man of many mercies, and a man of many praises, *Deo gratias*† was always in his mouth. Ingratitude is a heathenish sin, and leads to many vain imaginations and brutish abominations: Rom. i. 21—24. It is that foul sin that breaks out in the last times, and makes them hard and perilous, and is yoked with unholiness, 2 Tim. iii. 1, 2. It is a sin that renders men worse than brutes, even the most stupid of brutes, Isa. i. 2, 3. Ah, Christian, shame with thy ingratitude; what a base, unworthy, disingenuous spirit hast thou, who canst so easily pass by such great favours? Dost not thou thank God for

* Psalm cxix. 62.

† Thanks to God.

a meal's meat, and wilt not thou take notice of spiritual food? Canst thou deny that God hath visited thy soul with many real favours? what mean all these convictions, impressions, supports, and consolations that thou hast had? are all these small to thee? Do not they deserve thy praises? Is not thankfulness the tribute thou owest him? Canst thou do less than acknowledge what God hath done for thee? Shouldest thou not call upon others, and say, Come all you that fear God, and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul? * and should you not desire them to help you in praising God, as David, Psalm xxxiv. 3, "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together?" Ah, Christian, if thou be not thankful for God's favours, God loseth his glory, thou lovest the comfort of mercies, and thou wilt have a sad account to give another day. The God of heaven raise up thy heart to a thankful frame, otherwise as thou buriest former, so thou preventest future mercies; for thankfulness for past favours, is a secret solicitation for more, but God will not trust thee with what thou wantest, unless thou be thankful for what thou hast. Therefore rouse up thy dull heart to this great and pleasant duty, as David did, Psalm ciii. 1—3, and study what to render to the Lord for all his kindnesses, Psalm cxvi. 12.

(2.) Unfruitfulness betrays deficient improvement. When God's favours have been showered down upon us plentifully, how barren often are our hearts? how apt are we to return to folly after peace spoken? * It is a sad thing that any should sin against God, when the more kindness God expresseth, the greater the aggravation of sin. Hence it is, that the sins of God's people are so great, that God saith, Jer. xxxii. 30, "The children of Israel, and the children of Judah have only

* Psalm lxvi. 16.

† Psalm lxxxv. 8.

done evil before me, they only have provoked me to anger," as if the world beside were comparatively innocent. For besides that we sin against greater professions and engagements on our part, so against

The greatest advantages, and obligations laid upon us by God.

(1.) The principles God hath planted in the saints' hearts are the fruit of divine favour, and a great help against sin, and to sin notwithstanding doth aggravate sin. Ah, to sin against an enlightened mind, renewed will, sanctified affections, awakened conscience, and a divine nature, renders the sin more grievous, and the sinner's case more dangerous, at least in his own apprehension upon a thorough conviction: thus David mentions as an aggravation of his sin, Psalm li. 6, "In the hidden parts thou hast made me to know wisdom;" therefore this sin is worse in me than another who wanteth such a corrective principle to restrain sin, and promote holiness.

(2.) God's people's sins are committed against the greatest, the most endearing obligations that God lays on us, both as to light and love, mercies and means of grace. God rates the heinousness of his Israel's sin in proportion to his special kindness: Hos. xi. 4, "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love." Hos. vii. 13, 15. viii. 12. Jer. xxxi. 32, "Which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband to them;" there is great emphasis in that: see also Isa. v. 4. Jer. ii. 2—5. Mic. vi. 3, 4. Other men's sins displease God, the sins of his people grieve and vex him, because he calculated that they would behave themselves after another manner: Isa. lxiii. 8—10. God even complains of his own children, that he was broken with their treacherous hearts,* and pressed

* Ezek. vi. 9.

down as a cart pressed with sheaves ; * and indeed it pierces a man's heart when a child, or a friend, or a wife, upon whom he hath heaped many kindnesses shall behave basely or disingenuously to him ; when he may say as David did, † “ If it had been an enemy I might have borne it ; ” and as Cæsar said, ‡ “ What, thou my son, to lift up thy hand to strike me.” So may God say : what my son, my child, upon whom I have conferred so many favours, whom I have taken into so near relation with myself, whom I have effectually called and sanctified, to whom I have forgiven so many and such great sins, on whom I have conferred so many honours, with whom I have been so familiar, from whom I expected so much glory, in whom I have taken so much content ; oh that thou, even thou shouldest deal after this manner, to break my laws, grieve my Spirit, dishonour my name, abuse my favours ; oh this runs to my heart, I know not how to bear it, if it were a wicked man I could be avenged on him in another world, I could ease me of my adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies, || I can tell how to come even with them ; but for you, my children, I have an everlasting kindness for you, my design is to save your souls, and you put me to it to know what course to take with you, which makes me say, “ O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee ? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee ? ” § I have tried gentle means, and sought to win thee by love and kindness, but I see it will not do, my lenity is abused, my love is slighted, thou art hardened, I must take another course, I will do my strange work to which I am so averse, I will now use severity ; “ Behold I will melt them, and try them, for how shall I do for the daughter of my

* Amos ii. 9—13.

† Psalm lv. 12, 13.

‡ Καὶ σὺ τέκνον.

|| Isa. i. 24.

§ Hos. vi. 4.

people?"* I must not lose my children, and I see fair means will not bring them in, I must use sharper arguments, that may distress and nonplus them, and drive them to straits, that they may not know what other course to take, but to run to me for shelter. And all this is in covenant faithfulness, and pursuance of God's gracious designs of good to souls, as he saith, Hos. ii. 6, "Therefore I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall that she shall not find her paths." This is love and favour, for it is far better to be pricked with thorns, and kept in the right way; than wander into dangerous pit-falls by easy paths in an uninterrupted course. Ah, soul, thou that hast abused God's favours, mayest thank thyself for the rod, yea, and thank God that he will take the pains to scourge thee, rather than suffer thee to go on to abuse his favours.

CHAP. VIII.

THE SUBJECT CONSIDERED AS FURNISHING TOPICS FOR SELF-EXAMINATION.

Is it then a truth, that God's favour is a believer's life? and does it not become us all to ascertain whether we be in God's favour or not? O that this were well cleared up to the satisfaction of every heart. You will say, how shall I know that I am in God's favour? I will ask you four plain questions, and desire you to search your hearts for answers.

1. Hath the sense of God's anger been the death of

* Jer. ix. 7.

thy legal hopes arising from any supposed good in thyself? Have your souls been laid under deep convictions that God is angry with you, and that his anger is just? Have you searched for what sin God is angry? Have your hearts been deeply afflicted with that sin? Hath the guilt of sin lain upon your consciences, as an intolerable weight? Hast thou, reader, cried out with Isaiah, "Woe is me, I am undone because I am a man of unclean lips?" chap. vi. 5. Have thy bones been broken with penitent David? * Have God's arrows stuck fast in thee? Is there no soundness in thy flesh, because of God's anger, nor rest in thy bones because of thy sin? Hast thou even roared by reason of the disquietness of thy spirit? Psal. xxxviii. 1—11. Hast thou ever complained under the guilt of sin, and God's wrath, as a soul weary and heavy laden? † What sayest thou, hast thou ever with holy Job felt the arrows of the Almighty within thee, and the poison thereof drinking up thy spirits? Have the terrors of God set themselves in array against thee? ‡ Hast thou been pricked at the heart under the guilt of sin, as the Jews, || or with holy Paul hast thou found the commandment to be unto death? § Hast thou been slain in thy comforts, hopes and helps, under the sense of guiltiness? Ah, soul, thou didst never experience favour, till thou hast felt terror. The law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ; sense of wrath in some degree usually precedes sense of love; thou must sail from earth to heaven in the port of hell; sin must be bitter before Christ will be sweet to thee; thou wilt never know the benefit of God's favour, till thou hast lain under the sense of his anger, both in first conversion, and oftentimes in after desertions, as Heman and

* Psal. li. 8.

† Psal. xxxix. 10—12.

‡ Job vi. 4.

|| Acts ii. 37.

§ Rom. vii. 9, 10.

others of God's children have had experience :* yet with all this, the poor soul under all this displeasure, dares not but justify God, and condemn himself,† even if God should cast him into hell and eternal perdition ; he still confesseth that God punisheth him less than his iniquities deserve, looking upon it as of the Lord's mercy that he is not consumed,‡ and were it not that hell consists in the want of God's favour, a submission to the power of sin, and blaspheming God's name, the soul would willingly subject itself to what punishment the Lord should think fit to inflict upon him, that God may have the glory of his vindictive justice ; however the sinner looks upon himself as deserving it, and therefore judgeth himself worthy of death, and must shut his mouth for ever, if God should cast him into hell. || O, saith the poor convinced soul, what a dreadful malignity is there in sin ; O that abominable thing which God's soul hates ;§ what prodigious, infinite, endless evil there is in every sin ! it strikes at God's glory and Being, dishonours his name, crucifies Christ, grieves the Spirit, robs me of God's favour, darkens the sun, corrupts the air, ruins souls ; woe is me, what will become of me, my soul is in danger by reason of the Lord's anger.

2. Art thou convinced that the whole world cannot restore thee to God's favour ? Alas, all the angels in heaven, all the men on earth, all creature comforts, or created accomplishments and endeavours cannot by any means restore the soul to the favour of God ; no graces, duties or actings, can reconcile the soul to God, or conciliate his favour. Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or ten thousands of rivers of oil ? will the fruit of our brain or body atone for the

* Psal. lxxxviii. 15, 16. † Psal. li. 4. ‡ Ezra ix. 13. Lam. iii. 22.

|| 1 Cor. xi. 31. Rom. iii. 19. § Jer. xlv. 4—7.

sins of our souls? * No, no; when poor creatures have offended God, will he take a bullock out of their house, or he-goat out of their fold? No, he desires not sacrifice. † Well then, can holy men on earth interpose? No, though a Noah, Daniel, and Job, though a Lot, a Moses, and Samuel should stand up to speak good for an offending people, ‡ yet they cannot turn away God's wrath, or work upon God's heart to favour a people. Nay, suppose an angel in heaven should intercede for a sinner, he could not bring him into God's favour again, his interest with God is not sufficient to interpose betwixt an offended God, and the offending soul; he chargeth the angels with folly, to which of those holy ones then will men turn? for God's wrath will kill the foolish. || notwithstanding all that they can do for them; but even suppose these poor offending sinners should return to God with prayers, tears, and groans; alas, all their sweet incense may be abomination to him. § But what if they fast? if they do, yet God will not hear their cry. ¶ But suppose they reform their lives, obey God's commands, live holily? that is good, and absolutely necessary, yet that will not make God amends, pacify wrath, or purchase reconciliation with God; no, no, they that are in the flesh cannot please God; ** yea, though the soul be converted, and in a state of grace, yet their best righteousness is defective, and but as filthy rags; †† and without faith in Christ, the mediator, it is impossible to please God. ‡‡ A penitent sinner is convinced, that if all the holiness of all the saints in heaven and earth centered in one soul, it could not make satisfaction to justice

* Micah vi. 7.

† Psal. l. 9, 10. li. 16.

‡ Jer. xv. 1—3. Ezek. xiv. 14.

|| Job iv. 18. v. 1, 2.

§ Isa. i. 13, 15.

¶ Jer. xiv. 12.

** Rom. viii. 8.

†† Isa. lxiv. 6.

‡‡ Heb. xi. 6.

for the least sin, for sin is in a sort infinite, because the object offended is infinite; therefore the satisfaction must be commensurate with the evil that is in sin, and the infiniteness of God. God is a consuming fire to souls out of Christ; the soul dares not approach God, but through a mediator; we are accepted only in the beloved;* God is well pleased no way but in his beloved Son;† he has no friendly intercourse with sinners any way but over the mercy-seat; there is no fellowship with God in an amicable way without a mediator.‡ Alas, saith the soul, I am born out of God's favour, thus have lived, and thus must die, except infinite mercy pity me; and I see as God is infinite in mercy, so in justice, and justice must be satisfied, and I see nothing in the whole creation that can satisfy it; all the creatures are insignificant ciphers; my own righteousness is a covering too narrow to wrap myself in, or to secure my naked soul from the lashes of sin-avenging justice; what course must I take? what means must I use to obtain the favour of God, or to be delivered from the wrath to come?

3. Hast thou made it thy main business to get an interest in Jesus Christ? This is indeed the only way of accommodation: suppose a king is offended with his subjects, and he hath declared that there is no way of reconciliation with him, but employing his son to mediate for them; if those subjects prize their sovereign's favour, they will make use of the means he hath prescribed to regain it. Thus we find, Acts xii. 20, "Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nou-

* Eph. i. 6.

† Matt. xvii. 5.

‡ Exod. xxx. 6. Deut. v. 5, 27.

rished by the king's country." The case is ours, God is displeased with sinners ; we cannot subsist here safely, nor be happy in heaven without the King of heaven's favour, it becomes us therefore to sue for peace ; but no peace can be had, except the Lord Jesus, (our heavenly Blastus) be our friend to mediate for us, and the way to interest in Christ, is faith alone ; Christ's satisfaction and intercession have smoothed the brows, and quenched the wrath of God Almighty, and rendered God approachable by sinners ; he is the way, the truth, and life ; he delivers from the wrath to come ; he makes peace by the blood of his cross ; he alone brings us to God.* God saith to us, as Joseph to his brethren, " You shall not see my face except you bring your brother."† Now the old man hinders our closing with Christ, yet the poor soul wants supplies, and dares not go without Jesus Christ ; O what contests and strugglings are there to lay hold on Christ Jesus. One while the humble penitent is as John weeping, sadly weeping, because there is none in his view found to open the sealed book, and interpret what is in the Lord's heart towards sinners ; but when he is satisfied that Jesus Christ the lion of the tribe of Judah hath prevailed,‡ these despairing tears are wiped off his clouded face, and he conceives some hopes, just as Elihu describes it in Job xxxiii. 19—24, " He is chastened with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain," and so on ; at last when the ransom is found, then ver. 26, " He shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable unto him, and he shall see his face with joy : " this indeed is the only way of obtaining favour with God ; we shall behold God's reconciled face in the face of Jesus Christ.|| Let men mock on, saith the poor soul,

* John xiv. 6. 1 Thess. i. 10. Col. i. 20. 1 Peter iii. 18.

† Gen. xliii. 3.

‡ Rev. v. 4, 5.

|| 2 Cor. iv. 6.

this is my only way for God's favour, and my chief care is to get a title to Christ, this the word tells me is by believing, O that I had this faith! Lord, begin and carry on the work of faith with power; farewell all for Christ; I count all things but dung that I may win Christ and be found in him;* let all go, riches, honours, the friendship of the world, and favour of dearest relations for Christ; I will venture upon the displeasure of men, but I must have God's favour, whose favour soever I lose; therefore I must have the blessed Jesus, he is the chief of ten thousand. But a carnal heart loves the favour of men more than God's, as the Pharisees of old, John xii. 43.

4. What is God's conduct towards thee, and thy behaviour towards God? This mutual, reciprocal conduct, will be the best discovery of favour, as it is amongst friends.

First, For God's conduct towards thee, observe,

(1.) Doth not God's word single thee out by conviction? When thou hast read a chapter, or heard a sermon, hath not the Spirit of God set it home upon thy conscience, as if he had called thee by name, saying, thou art the man? so that as the unlearned Corinthian, thou hast fallen down, and said, God is in this ordinance of a truth.† This hath set thy soul a trembling under the word, and it followed thee, and would not suffer thee to rest in sin, till it awaked thy conscience, and shook thee out of thy security; though this was sharp, yet bless God for it, as a precious result of his favour.

(2.) Dost thou not find some gracious operations of God's Spirit in secret duties, such as prayer, meditation, and self-examination? doth not God's spirit draw out faith, love, repentance, and desires? doth it not some-

* Phil. iii. 8, 9.

† 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25.

times help thy infirmities with sighs and groans that cannot be expressed? * None can tell what warnings, meltings, and quickenings there are at some seasons in thy heart; God knows the meaning of his Spirit within thee. O, whence proceed all these operations? surely not from flesh and blood, nature could not stir up thy heart in this sort.

(3.) Doth not God's Spirit open thy eyes to behold, and raise thy heart to desire, the ways of God? Is not religion in its most uninviting dress to flesh and blood, most lovely in thy eyes, as it was in Moses's? † Hath not the Lord engaged thy affections with the beauty of wisdom's ways? ‡ Hath not wisdom entered into thy heart, and knowledge been sweet to thy soul? || Hast thou not found more spiritual acquaintance with gospel mysteries, and more real content in holy duties, so that it may be said, "Flesh and blood have not revealed these things to thee, but our Father which is in heaven?" Matt. xvi. 17.

(4.) Dost thou not find sometimes a comfortable return of thy poor prayers? Canst thou not say, that some mercies which God hath given, have this impressed upon them, Prayer answered? so that thou canst truly call them Samuels, that is, God's hearing: Psalm xxxiv. 4, "I sought the Lord, and he heard me." And this answer of prayer is a clear evidence that God is with us, Psalm lvi. 9. When God prepares the heart, and bows his ear, is not that a great token of his special favour? Psalm x. 17.

(5.) Hath not preventing grace seasonably stepped in to keep thy soul from sin? Just as thou hast been entering upon temptation, upon the brink ready to fall, hath not the mercy of God held thee up? § hath

* Rom. viii. 26.

† Heb. xi. 26.

‡ Prov. iii. 17.

|| Prov. ii. 10.

§ Psalm xxxviii. 15—17.

not God prevented thee with his blessings of goodness? Psalm xxi. 3. How oft hath God kept thy heart and the temptation asunder? and how many times kept thee from the commission of those sins to which thou hast been inclined and engaged?

(6.) Hath not assisting grace come in with secret and seasonable supports, according to the promise, "My grace shall be sufficient for thee?" and according to David's experience, Psalm cxxxviii. 3, "In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul?" How many a time has the Lord been ready to save thee when thy heart was fainting, and flesh failing? * O what seasonable and satisfying incomes have fetched thee again to life; surely there was rich favour in these.

(7.) Hath not God by his Spirit sometimes sealed his love to thy soul? Look into thy heart, look back upon experience, is there never a token of love? Hath not God's Spirit brought its own evidence along with it, and put thy soul out of doubt, as if thou hadst heard an audible voice, saying, I have loved thee, saith Jehovah: what sayest thou? Though thou canst not expect immediate revelations, yet hast thou not been satisfied of these divine intimations and whisperings to thy heart, and of the Spirit's witnessing or sealing? † especially considering,

[i.] That his favour came in the way of a promise; this token of love was wrapped up in the word: Psal. cxix. 65, "Thou hast dealt well with thy servant according to thy word."

[ii.] That it was conveyed to thy soul in duties after many prayers, tears, repentings, and actings of faith. When the soul hath been digging in the valley of Baca,

* Isa. xxxviii. 20. Psalm lxxiii. 26.

† Rom. viii. 16. Eph. i. 13.

or of weeping, God's rain of love fills the pools, and so makes it a valley of Beracah, or blessing, Psalm lxxxiv. 6.

[iii.] The sense of God's favour came in suitably and seasonably : when thou wast at extremities, and wast saying, Will he be favourable no more? is his mercy clean gone for ever? hath God forgotten to be gracious?—then comes in some help which makes thee say, This is my infirmity. See Psalm lxxvii. 7—10.

[iv.] The effects of God's favour do evidence whence it proceeds : for as it is said of the king's favour, Prov. xix. 12, "It is as the dew upon the grass;" even so this favour of God makes souls fruitful. What kindly operations hath it upon the heart? These warm beams of divine love have a blessed influence upon the state of the mind and feelings of the breast. This leads me to

The second thing, which is thy behaviour towards God : and this may be considered both when experiencing the manifestations of God's favour, and in the general course of thy life.

1. When God manifests his favour to thee,

(1.) Dost thou gratefully welcome and hoard up the evidences of his love? Our friends' tokens of love we lay up among our chief treasures; sealed deeds are carefully deposited; we highly value the least expression of our friends' love, yea, we value ourselves according to our friends' respects for us: Cant. viii. 10, "Then was I in his eyes as one that found favour." Is it thus with thy soul? Dost thou prize God's loving-kindness above life itself? Psalm lxiii. 3.

(2.) Art thou truly afraid of losing God's favour? Dost thou charge thine own heart and others, that they stir not up, nor awake thy beloved, as the spouse? Cant. ii. 7. Dost thou feel workings of heart, as Ezra,

chap. ix. 8, 14, after favour and grace received? Dost thou maintain thy spiritual watch? Dost thou exercise a holy jealousy over thyself and estate, lest the Lord withdraw?

(3.) Dost thou draw out, and make spiritual use of the sense of God's favour, to thy own good, and for the advantage of others? How doth God help thee to recollect experience, and say as David, Psalm xlii. 6, "O my God, my soul is cast down within me, therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, from the hill of Mizar," &c. that is, I will recollect the experience I have had of thy goodness and mercy; so for others, Psalm lxvi. 16, "Come all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul."

(4.) Do not these favours make thy soul long for the manifestations of God's favour in his immediate presence in heaven, where thou shalt be above danger of offending him, or of losing his presence? Doth not thy soul long for, and love Christ's appearing? * Is it not thy language, O when shall my soul be with God? How long shall I dwell in Meshech, and sojourn in the tents of Kedar? when shall I be in his presence, where there is fulness of joy, when shall I be satisfied with his likeness? † O those joys, those comforts, that light of the King's countenance wherein is life, true life, lasting life! If God's favour be so sweet here, when only partially enjoyed, O what will be the full vision of God in glory? when I shall see him encircled with the splendours of celestial majesty, not through a glass darkly, but face to face, and know as also I am known. ‡ O blessed day! O welcome day! when shall that day dawn? when shall my soul take her flight above yonder sun, moon, and stars, into my Saviour's

* 2 Tim. iv. 8.

† Psalm xvi. 11. xvii. 15.

‡ 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

presence, where there will be no need of them, for the glory of God doth lighten the holy city, and the Lamb is the light thereof? * O blessed day, O happy state, O secure and delightful place !

2. What is thy behaviour God-wards in the general course of thy life? for if God had a peculiar regard for thee, it will be evident from the discharging of thy duty towards God, both in the frame of thy spirit, and in thy conversation, according to this rule : you may discern the workings of God's heart towards you by the movements of your hearts towards God. Well then, let me ask thee these questions, I can but briefly propound them, and leave them to thy meditations.

(1.) Art thou afraid of doing any thing that may provoke the Lord? thou therefore hatest all sin because it is offensive to him, and sayest, "How shall I do this wickedness, and sin against God?" † Away with occasions of sin, God forbid that I should ever meddle with sin again, not because it is destructive to me, but because it is offensive to God ; nor only as provoking his wrath, but as grieving his Spirit. Thus the soul fears the Lord and his goodness. ‡

(2.) Dost thou daily walk in all ways well-pleasing to God, keeping close to his commands, yielding to the impressions of his blessed Spirit, resolving upon new obedience, with full purpose of heart cleaving to the Lord? Is it not thy main care and prayer that thou mayest walk worthy of him to all pleasing? Thou dost not matter for pleasing of men, so that thou mayest approve thy heart to God, exercising thyself to have a conscience void of offence towards God and man. ||

(3.) Dost thou make it thy work to attend upon him where he is wont to distribute his favours, especially

* Rev. xxi. 23.

† Gen. xxxix. 9.

‡ Hosea iii. 5.

|| Acts xi. 23. Col. i. 10. Gal i. 10. Acts xxiv. 16.

in all public ordinances, hearing the word, offering prayer, and receiving the seals of the covenant? Dost thou make it thy business to hold communion with God? Thou art grieved when thou missest an opportunity of enjoying God, yea, thou makest this thy object in all duties, to seek and see God's face, Psalm xxvii. 4, 8, 9.

(4.) Is not thy soul troubled when God withdraws from thee the sense of his favour? When thou hast provoked him, and he goeth, doth not thy heart fail? art thou not sick of love?* how dost thou take it? Dost thou carry thyself as Esau, when he had sold his birth-right, that ate and drank, rose up, and went away? † or dost thou lay it deeply to heart, languish, and faint? art thou filled with anguish and pain, and canst rest no where, till God's favour be regained? This is a child-like frame.

(5.) Hast thou not a regard for all those whom God regards? dost thou not highly prize, and dearly love the saints that are excellent in the earth, in whom is all thy delight? ‡ dost thou not honour them that fear the Lord? Thou couldst indeed put these in thy bosom, not because they are outwardly amiable by reason of external accomplishments, or because they are of thy sentiments, but because the image of God is upon them; || grace is in their hearts, therefore they are lovely in thine eyes.

(6.) Dost thou feel the body of sin within thee thy greatest burden? Where are thy groans under it, thy griefs for it? art thou weary with it, striving against it? dost thou cry out daily with Paul, "Who shall deliver me?" Art thou still casting off every weight, and that sin which so easily besets thee? art thou still

* Cant. v. 6, 8.

‡ Psalm xvi. 3.

† Gen. xxv. 34.

|| 1 John iii. 13, 14.

purifying thyself as he is pure? dost thou look at holiness as thy great happiness? what care dost thou take to promote sanctification?*

(7.) Dost thou love God, though thou knowest not assuredly whether he love thee or not? dost thou believe in him, though thou mayest have no perception of him by sense and experience? nay, dost thou follow him as the poor woman, though he seem to flee from thee? and more than this, dost thou run to him, though he may seem to fight against thee? Have him thou must, thou canst not be put off with repulses, thy soul followeth hard after him, and his right hand upholds thee therein. This love to God is an evidence that God loves thee :† 1 Cor. viii. 3.

CHAP. IX.

THE SUBJECT FURNISHES INSTRUCTION, AND GIVES
SCOPE FOR EXHORTATION.

SOME things may be pressed on the attention both of those who enjoy the favour of God, and of those who do not.

1. Those who experience not the favour of God, who can claim no title to it, but who wear out their days under a participation of the general bounty of Providence, ought to attend to the following considerations :—

(1.) Methinks God's common favours should engage your hearts to look after special love : if God be so

* Rom. vii. 24. Heb. xii. 1. 1 John iii. 3.

† 1 Pet. i. 8. Matt. xv. 23. Job xiii. 15. Psalm lxiii. 8.

good to the worst, surely he will be much better to the good; if he give such large crumbs to dogs, he hath better portions for children. Doth he make his sun to shine upon just and unjust promiscuously? * surely there is a brighter sun of his love shines on them that fear him. If heathens have rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, if he fill their hearts with food and gladness, then he will drop down soul-refreshing influences into the hearts of his dear people, and much more refresh their hearts with distinguishing love: and can you content yourselves with the former when better may be had? Can you be content with health, wealth, honours, and outward comforts, of which the great ones of the world have had as large a share as you desire, yet are now in hell? Rather protest with brave Luther, that you will not be put off with these things. Alas, what will gold and silver, fair houses, costly diet, great attendance, advantage you when your souls are sitting upon your lips, and your heart-strings are breaking, and you are summoned by death to appear in another world before the great Judge? Will these things procure you favour in that court? will the God of heaven favour you for being a person of quality, or of honour? No, no, sirs; you must be stripped of all these things, God will not respect the persons of men in that day, the things of this life will neither satisfy, sanctify, nor save. O think of those that with Naphthali have been satisfied with favour, and full of the outward blessings of the Lord, how they have left all, and that, in the midst of their heaven, and like fools they have gone down to hell. † Alas, sirs, the things of this world are neither suitable nor durable, it is only the favour of God that will stand you in stead in another world, and indeed that is the only good

* Matt. v. 45.

† Deut. xxxiii. 23. Jer. xvii. 11.

for a life to come.* Now, in God's favour there is eternal life, this is life eternal thus to know God, this is the tree of life, the bread of life, living waters:† nay, this favour of God will sweeten and season all outward favours, without which they will not be blessings, but curses. O that by these cords of love you might be drawn to God!‡ O think, is not God, Christ, his Spirit, pardon, peace of conscience, heaven, infinitely better than corn, cattle, meat, clothes, friends? Doth not God shame rebels with multiplicity of common favours? O that I might be one of his friends, that mercies might melt my heart; let me have such favour with God, that I may be owned in the great day.

(2.) Consider the wisest and holiest men on earth advise you to it, and take this course themselves; they counsel you to nothing but what they do themselves. Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, all the holy patriarchs, prophets, apostles, evangelists, martyrs, confessors, all that cloud of witnesses, that army of gracious souls that are now triumphing in glory, made this choice, and they have sped well; they scorned the favour of men, in comparison of God's, and God hath been found of them, they now enjoy the light of his countenance, and dwell in his immediate presence. O sirs, follow you them who through faith and patience do inherit the promises. Did David repent of his choice for preferring the light of God's countenance to men's corn, and wine, and oil? || Were not the Bereans more noble than others for welcoming the word?§ will not high-born spirits aspire after great things? and should not

* Job. xxxiv. 29. Luke xii. 21, 31.

† John xvii. 3. Rev. xxii. 2. John iv. 14.

‡ Mal. ii. 2. Hos. xi. 4. || Psalm iv. 6. § Acts xvii. 11.

you? Do not all the saints in heaven speak this language jointly—Follow us? would they not all unite in this exhortation—O seek God's face and favour? would not lost souls in hell, if sent to men on earth, urge this point, from their woful experience—O seek God's favour, or you will be for ever banished from it as we are? all God's ministers, your pious neighbours, your religious friends and relations, all dying persons, whose eyes are at last opened, will give you this counsel unanimously—If you love your souls, seek to obtain the favour of God. We poor ministers make it our work to study, to preach, to travel to you, to be in pain over you, and to pray for you, and what is all this for, but to persuade you to be reconciled to God,* if it be possible to bring you into the favour of God. O that we could accomplish this end! we should be sufficiently rewarded; what would we give to win your hearts to God? what joy would there be to the friends of the bridegroom,† if the match should be concluded, and your souls married to Christ? We would think all our labour well bestowed; nay, if we by our death could be instruments to bring you into God's favour; but what speak I of our death, Christ died to accomplish it, this cost blood, yea, the blood of God. O souls, shall nothing prevail with you? shall neither the example of the best men, nor the prayers, tears, entreaties or persuasions of your ministers or best friends, nor the blood of Christ, nor the blood of your own immortal souls prevail with you to look after God's favour? What then shall we say? we have delivered our message, if you be careless, your blood be upon your own heads.

(3.) Consider how intent the men of the world are to obtain the favour of men. “Many will entreat favour

* 2 Cor. v. 20.

† John iii. 29.

of the prince ;* and every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts," Prov. xix. 6. What running, what making friends, base compliance, and crouching according to the humours of superiors, to obtain their favour? If the poor tenant be out of favour with his rich landlord, what means doth he use to obtain it? And is the favour of the God of heaven of no value with you, of him who can make heaven and earth to tremble when once he is angry? of that God who can frown you into hell, and destroy you with a rebuke of his countenance. Alas, sirs, who would live out of his favour one hour? How darest thou eat and drink, and talk, and walk, and sleep, when thou art out of the favour of God? How knowest thou but God's wrath may wax hot against thee, and thou perish from the way? How canst thou say, that thou shalt be another night out of hell? If God be thine enemy, and angry at thee, he hath hourly advantage against thee : you will say, God forbid, I hope I am in God's favour. I answer, I wish it be so, but thou wast not born so, thou art by nature a child of wrath as well as others,† and the wrath of God abides still upon thee,‡ unless taken off by Jesus Christ ; thou hast no interest in Christ without faith, and thou hast no faith by nature, nor canst thou work it in thine own heart : but if faith be there, all other saving graces are radically there. And art thou indeed born again? art thou translated from death to life? hast thou experienced those painful feelings usually created in regeneration? All men have not faith, every soul is not new born ; the change is great, life and death depend upon it ; the heart is deceitful, most men are mistaken in this weighty case. Will the wordly wise be at uncertainties about their estates? have they not a mind to make all as sure as

* Prov. xxix. 26.

† Eph. ii. 3.

‡ John iii. 36.

they can? and doth not men's practice provoke or condemn thee? Suppose the men of the world obtain their ends—what is a prince's favour to God's? "Put not your trust in princes—blessed is the man that hath the God of Jacob for his help."* What if the base, man-pleasing flatterer get a little popular favour, how soon may men's hosannas be turned into "crucify him?" At what rate would the enamoured lover purchase the favour of his mistress, and when obtained, it may be, purchase nothing but sorrow? O take shame to yourselves that you take no more pains to obtain the favour of God; and now from henceforth let the kingdom of heaven suffer violence, and seek for that honour that cometh from God only: the matter is of infinite concernment, even as much as your souls are worth to all eternity.

(4.) There is yet a possibility of obtaining God's favour. Poor sinner, thou art yet alive, out of hell, thousands that were alive as thou art are past hope, they shall never have offers of grace more, no terms of accommodation shall ever be propounded to them, but they are banished for ever from the presence of the Lord, without hopes of ever seeing his face with comfort; this may be, must be thy case shortly, if thou obtain not God's favour here. The devils never had an offer of God's favour, those high favourites in the court of heaven, upon the first transgression were cast headlong into everlasting chains under darkness, reserved unto the judgment of the last day;† but thou hast heard the glad tidings of salvation by Jesus Christ the Saviour of the world; the good news concerns men, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, goodwill towards men."‡ It is to you, O men, that wisdom calls, and her voice is to the sons of men,|| it is to you

* Psal. cxlvi. 3—5. † Jude, 6. ‡ Luke ii. 14. || Prov. viii. 4.

that are alive, this day to whom the word of his salvation is sent; yet there is hope; yet for aught we know, the door is open: we are sent to living persons, the living, the living may praise the Lord, yet the Spirit of God is striving with you; yet God holds forth the golden sceptre, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation; he hath limited it to a day, this day of life; in vain shall you sue for favour when life is gone; the foolish virgins may stand long at the door and knock, and cry, "Lord, Lord, open to us;" when the door is shut, when the gulf is fixed, when death hath done its office, then there is no hope, no help, the disease will be incurable, your state wretched, your souls eternally undone; alas! alas for you! that ever you were born, if you would give thousands of pounds, yea, the whole world, were it yours to give, it would be in vain; all your wailings and piercing cries will not move God's heart to favour you, you must be for ever separated from his presence, and from the glory of his power, into endless, unintermitting, remediless torments, where the God of mercy will never cast a propitious eye upon you more; but as it were laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear comes upon you; for the scene of grace will be over, and justice now will act its part against rebellious and impenitent sinners for ever and ever.

You will say, but is there any hope? I fear I have sinned away the day of grace, and the interposition of God's Spirit; woe is me!

Ans. Neither thou, nor I, nor any creature breathing can tell that this is the case; still God is holding thy soul in life, and who knows but he may crown thee also with loving kindness and tender mercy? it may be, God hath spared thee for that end thus long: who knoweth but he will return and leave a blessing be-

hind him? * Even the poor Ninevites could thus argue, when they had no grounds of encouragement : Who can tell if God will turn away his fierce anger? † This is ground sufficient for a venture : it may be, ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger, ‡ or rather, it may be, he may turn away his anger, and be reconciled to you, and be favourable to your souls ; yea, be assured of it, if you be sincere in repenting and believing in Christ, you shall certainly be received into favour, there is no peradventure in it ; such as come to him he will in no wise cast out. || If the wicked forsake their way, and the ungodly their thoughts, and turn to the Lord, he will have mercy upon them, he will abundantly pardon ; § free grace will be magnified, their souls will be accepted, their sins will be pardoned, God hath said it and he will perform it. O believe not Satan, nor a perverse heart, against an infallible word of the faithful God. Say not as some forlorn miscreants invited to repent, there is no hope, no, for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go, ¶ as if he should say, it is in vain to move me to repent, I see my case is desperate, I lie under a curse and am given up to hardness of heart ; God will not pardon me, to hell I must go, I might as well take my pleasure in sinning, and be sentenced to misery for something, for to the devil I am going. Oh, horrible, dreadful frame ! God forbid that any should say, there is no hope at this rate ; there is certainly hope in Israel concerning this thing. ** Sin not as one desperate, forsake not thine own mercies, †† confess thy sin, repent and give glory to God ; there is mercy for the

* Joel ii. 14.

† Zeph. ii. 3.

§ Isa. lv. 7.

** Ezra x. 2.

† Jonah iii. 9.

|| John vi. 37.

¶ Jer. ii. 25. xviii. 12.

†† Jonah ii. 8.

chief of sinners, Paul is a pattern, Manasseh an instance, some of the Corinthians are lively examples. O kick not against his tender mercy, despise not the riches of his grace, scorn not his favours; let God's loving kindness lead thee to repentance, let hopes of acceptance be thy encouragement. When a pirate at sea, or rebel at land have no hopes of their prince's favour, they grow desperate; but a proclamation of gracious reception, especially a promise of preferment melts their hearts into submission; O that gospel offers might have the like efficacy upon your hearts! make a trial, put God to it, see whether he will be as good as his word; the report of his merciful nature, methinks should make you say as Benhadad's servants, "Behold now, we have heard that the king of Israel is a merciful king; let us put sackcloth upon our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel; peradventure he will save our lives;"* the life of our precious souls. You have even better assurance than they had, for the Lord our God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him, 2 Chron. xxx. 9. You will say I am very desirous of God's favour; but how shall I do to obtain it? what means must I use to obtain the favour of God? I answer, think not that you can procure God's favour, or purchase it with your endeavours, or work yourself into it by your duties or obedience; his love is free, yet he hath appointed ways for his poor creatures to use as means, which he prescribes for them, in order to the obtaining and enjoying of this mercy, and they are such as these briefly:—

1. Serious self-reflection. When God intends good to a person he engageth him to look into his own heart and state, to consider his ways, to commune with his

* 1 Kings xx. 31.

heart.* There are four inquiries I entreat you to make relative to yourselves.

(1.) Am I in God's favour or not? O I have great need to get this case of conscience clearly solved upon scripture grounds; every one doth not partake of this special favour of God, nor I by nature, for I am a child of wrath as I come into this world; am I changed, is my soul converted? what fruits of God's special love have I experienced in my soul! O that I could prove my work, prove my state whether I be in Christ, and Christ in me or not!† I must know, let the case be what it may, uncertainties will not serve my turn, loth I am to be deceived in a matter of so great moment.

(2.) What if I be out of God's favour? oh fearful state, woe is me, it had been better I had never been born; I am as sure to be lost as God is true, if I live and die so, and I may die this night, I know not but I may be in hell before morning; woe is me if I be not in God's favour, I am a bond-slave to Satan, an enemy to God and God to me, then all the creatures are my enemies, I am worse than the brutes, comparatively happy were I, if I could die as a dog or horse; woe is me, my soul is going into eternity, and I know not whither; but certain I am, I can never be happy in this world, or in another world, but by and in the favour of God.

(3.) How came it to pass, that my soul lost God's favour? what are the grounds of the quarrel? whence came this distance and difference betwixt the great God, and my poor soul? Adam was in favour, but lost it by sinning against God, in eating of the forbidden fruit; here the controversy first commenced, and I am guilty, and have ever since I was born followed that bad example, walked in the same steps, and so widened the difference; sin is only the make-bate be-

* Psal. cxix. 59.

† Gal. vi. 4. 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

tween God and my soul, it is that abominable thing that hides his face, provokes his wrath, and will separate my soul from God for ever.* Oh what a wretched being am I by reason of sin! oh that my soul could lay it deeply to heart, as that which hath done me so much injury!

(4.) What can I do to make God amends? will prayers, tears, labours, diligence in duties, resolution of obedience, pacify or please the Lord? will sufferings and sorrow quench the fire of God's anger? Oh, no, there is no created being whatsoever can make up this breach: if I could perfectly keep the law, and offend in no tittle, in thought, word or deed, that will not do it: performing a new duty, is no payment of an old debt; if I should lie in hell for ever, that endless punishment of a finite creature will not satisfy infinite justice, and therefore the utmost farthing cannot be paid; woe is me, is there no remedy? yes, the gospel propounds one, and that is Jesus Christ.

2. Sound-hearted faith in Christ. Whenever poor sinners are brought into God's favour, the next work God effects by his Spirit, is to produce a gospel faith, and this God doth,

(1.) By engaging careless sinners to a diligent attendance upon the word preached, for faith comes by hearing. † As this is a great and important duty, so it is a condition to which God hath made promises: "Hear, and your souls shall live." ‡ It is God's way and course into which he usually brings that sinner whom he is pleased to renew by his grace; be sure, then, that thou watch daily at his gates, waiting at the posts of his doors; || turn not thy back upon God's appointment; attend to the most plain and piercing ministry, it is the power of God unto salvation; who

* Isa. lix. 2. † Rom. x. 17. ‡ Isa. lv. 3. || Prov. viii. 34.

knows but God may send down his Spirit on the hearing of faith? * This is the method of his grace, first to reconcile men to his ordinances, and so by them to himself.

(2.) He makes the poor soul mind the word spoken. The sinner was wont to disregard truths as uninteresting or unimportant, but now conviction is fastened, and his heart being deeply affected, he cannot but confess that God is in his word of a truth. † O that at last you would consider, and receive with meekness the engrafted word as a word of conviction, that you would not despise prophesying, nor quench the Spirit! If God intend you good, he will pierce and break your hearts, and make you solicitous about salvation, and to cry out, What shall I do to be saved? ‡ Soul-concerns will be a leading consideration in your thoughts, and then you proceed on the road to further good.

(3.) He opens the eyes of men, to see further the nature of true justifying faith, that it is not such a dead, heartless thing as it is ordinarily taken to be; and that the faith which they imagined they had, is not the faith of God's elect; and that the soul hath not indeed a gospel faith, never did savingly believe, yet must necessarily have that faith, or be lost for ever. This is that which the Scripture assigns to be one of the works of the Spirit, John xvi. 8, 9; the Spirit shall convince the world of sin: what sin? because they believe not on me. O sirs, that you would study your unbelieving state! Think with thyself: the faith which will bring me off at the great day, must not be a faith of my own coining, but God's stamping; and alas, did I ever see the want of this? have I been convinced of the difficulty of believing and its necessity? what a sad thing will it be, if I go to the grave with a

* Rom. i. 16. Gal. iii. 2. † 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25. ‡ Acts ii. 37.

presumption, instead of a sound faith? I see, I see I have been deluded with Satan's brat, rather than the genuine fruit of God's Spirit: oh, what shall I do for a grain of saving faith?

(4.) He engages the poor guilty sinner to struggle with his own heart in the exercise of believing. O that I could believe! O that my heart were knit to Christ! fain would I accept of Christ, but I am beaten off, Satan and my own heart oppose it, I am like a man swimming against the stream, running uphill, I am just laying hold, but beat off again: I cry as the poor man in the gospel, "Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief:"* yet I will not give up the attempt, guilt makes me look on God as an enemy; yet I will say with Job, "Though he slay me, yet I will trust in him."† I have no where else to go, no course else to take, Christ I must have, or I am undone for ever—Christ's person, as God and man, in the effects of both estates, humiliation and exaltation, in all his offices, Prophet, Priest, King—Christ's merit to satisfy, and Spirit to sanctify—I will quit all things for him, it is the King's Son only that can bring my soul into favour with God: Prov. viii. 35, "Whoso findeth him findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord." If the Lord Jesus were mine, saith the soul, I question not but I should obtain favour with God, his blood is the atonement, he is the propitiation for sins, I must come to God by him, as the mystical ladder of Jacob. Alas, what shall I do? this heavy foot of mine will not step upon this ladder, this palsy hand will not lay hold on him; Lord, make my foot to move that I may come to Christ, strengthen my hand to receive him. I shall briefly touch the other means of enjoying God's favour, which are,

* Mark ix. 24.

† Job xiii. 15.

3. Self-resignation to God. Give up yourselves to God in covenant ; nothing can satisfy you but God himself, nothing can satisfy God but yourselves ; offer up *your bodies as a living sacrifice*, instead of the bodies of dead beasts under the law—*holy*, instead of carnal ordinances—*reasonable*, instead of irrational brutes, and this shall be acceptable to God, Rom. xii. 1. If you vow yourselves as a free-will offering to the Lord, he will graciously accept of your dedication, and smile upon you in Christ. Study his word, understand the terms of the covenant, accept voluntarily of those conditions, take his yoke upon you, put your necks under that easy yoke, and look upon it as your relief and pleasure, honour and ornament. First give up yourselves to the Lord, and then to his ministers by the will of God, then be ready to profess your subjection to the gospel of Christ ; * be ready to say I am the Lord's, call yourselves by the name of Jacob, subscribe with your hand to the Lord, and surname yourselves by the name of Israel, Isa. xlv. 5. Be ready to to give any pledges and testimonies of your fidelity, in troth-pledging to be the Lord's servants for ever ; give all the members of thy body, and faculties of thy soul to his service ; receive his words, hide his commandments with thee, incline thy ear to wisdom, apply thy heart to understanding, lift up thy voice, cry, seek for them as for silver, then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God ; † for the Scripture saith, " He that diligently seeketh good, procureth favour," Prov. xi. 27, that is, he that gives up himself to God in the way of his appointments, shall enjoy favour in the eyes of God and men : " A good man obtaineth favour of the Lord."—Prov. xii. 2. Make it thy business to walk with God, watch over

* 2 Cor. viii. 5. ix. 13.

† Prov. ii. 1—5.

thy heart, mortify lusts, exercise graces, perform duties, do all the good, avoid all the evil thou canst, and see what the effect will be: "Among the righteous there is favour."—Prov. xiv. 9. Favour towards the cause of God, favour in God towards them; for thou Lord wilt bless the righteous, with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield.

4. Earnest prayer and supplication. Psalm cxix. 58, "I entreated thy favour with my whole heart;" it is worth seeking, his favour merits our petitions, O plead hard for it, be not put off without it; let such language as this be in thy heart, or on thy lips—Lord, here I am a poor forlorn wretch, a guilty sinner; once the first man Adam in my nature was in thy favour, as one of the courtiers of heaven, he walked all the days of his innocency in the light of thy countenance; but alas, he fell, offended thy Majesty, proved a traitor, lost thy favour, and we in him, by breaking thy laws; and now the poor, wretched human race are banished from the palace of the prince, into a dungeon of darkness, to lie and perish in the shades of sin, guilt, wrath and endless despair; shouldst thou give me my due, thou mayest justly banish me amongst devils and damned spirits for ever: but, Lord, though I deserve no favour, Jesus Christ doth, he drank of the brook in the way, he made a passage to thyself by a new and living way; the sun of righteousness is risen, hath banished the shades of gloomy darkness caused by God's displeasure, hath brought life and immortality to light, hath removed frowns from the face of God, that poor sinners may behold him in the face of Jesus Christ; * through the tender mercy of our God, the day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of

* 2 Cor. iv. 6.

death, and to guide our feet in the way of peace.* Lord, smile upon me a poor sinner through thy Son, O for one beam of the sun of righteousness! Lord, grant that my soul may be accepted in the beloved; cast one eye of pity upon a poor sinner; let thy bowels of compassion yearn towards thy creature in misery, and give me some fruits of thy grace, make me amiable in thy sight, put thy comeliness upon me, and then take delight in me as thy child; and though thou canst see nothing in myself worthy acceptance, yet when thou hast adorned me with thy image and graces, thou wilt show favour to the work of thy hands; thou hast a love, not only of pity, but of complacency to some of thy creatures, and why not to me? Sun of righteousness, shine upon me, Lord, speak comfortably to thy servant; many are a terror to me, Satan affrights me, the world hates me, my conscience condemns me; but be not thou a terror to me, thou art my hope in the day of evil;† Lord, I am not fit to come into thy presence, for I am both polluted and guilty, yet have mercy upon me according to thy loving-kindness, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions, cast my sins behind thy back; but cast not me away from thy presence;‡ for thy servant, the son of David's sake, turn not away the face of thine anointed;§ he is thy beloved Son in whom thou art well pleased,¶ he well pleased with me through him; O favour me with the favour which thou bearest to thy people; visit me with thy salvation;¶¶ look upon me, and be merciful unto me as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name, Psalm cxix. 132.

* Luke i. 78, 79.

† Jer. xvii. 17.

‡ Psalm li. 1—11.

|| Psalm cxxxii. 10.

§ Matt. iii. 17.

¶¶ Psalm cvi. 4.

CHAP. X.

THE SUBJECT CONCLUDED UNDER THE ARTICLE OF INSTRUCTION WITH AN ADDRESS TO THE OB- JECTS OF DIVINE FAVOUR.

THE second description of persons whom this doctrine instructs are saints, God's own people, the sincere professors of religion, that have a covenant title to, and interest in the favour of God, which indeed is the soul's life. Now concerning these, there are Christians of two sorts, for some *want*, and some *enjoy* a sense of divine favour.

I. Those that want God's favour, at least the sense of it; for as Davenant characterizes the favour of God, which he calls, "a bond of eternal good pleasure;"* this depends upon the discriminating grace of God: this bond is indissoluble, and cannot be weakened; for whom he loves once, he loves to the end. But there is also a love of complacency,† which includes the sense, enjoyment, and comfort of divine love, this love of intimate friendship, intercourse and familiarity, may be lost, and often is wanting, which hath made pious souls cry out, as though God had forsaken them, hid his face, dealt with them as if he were their enemy, or had cast them off for ever.

Here I shall endeavour to answer first, some objections; and secondly, some cases of conscience.

The objections are such as these,

Obj. Can I be in God's favour that am so unworthy of it? none so unfit.

Ans. 1. There is a twofold favour of God.

* Vinculum æternæ benevolentiae.

† Amor amicitiae.

(1.) Of benevolence, a love of good-will, from which he makes worthy.

(2.) A love of complacency and delight, whereby he owns, accepts and receives to his bosom, and embraces the soul that is so made worthy by sanctifying grace. All the world is unworthy of God's favour by nature; Rom. iii. 10, "There is none righteous, no, not one." Nor doth God set his love upon any, for any worthiness in them, but because he will love them; he draws arguments from his own bosom to do them good: but then when he hath graciously renewed their hearts by his Spirit, then he accounts them worthy in a gospel sense, and so favours them, that "they shall walk with him in white, for they are worthy," Rev. iii. 4.

2. None are by the Lord judged so worthy of special favours, as those that judge themselves most unworthy. Who had more of God's special favour than Abraham, who is called the friend of God, yet he accounts himself dust and ashes? Jacob was singularly regarded, as appears from visions of God, and answers of prayer which he had; yet looks on himself as less than the least of God's mercies. So David and Paul, that judged themselves as beasts, less than all saints, greatest of sinners; yet who had more revelations and manifestations of God's favour? Look through the Bible, and you will find that God's favour descends still into valleys, and that he honours those most that honour themselves least; see Psal. xxv. 14. Matt. viii. 8, 10. Luke i. 52, 53. xiv. 10, 11. James iv. 6.

Obj. But I am a depraved, polluted, sinful creature, a compound of vanity and wickedness: can God have any favour for such a one as I am?

Answ. 1. You must distinguish betwixt God's having respect to sin, and having respect to those in whom sin is. It is true, the righteous Lord loveth righteous-

ness, and hateth iniquity; yea, he abhorreth the wicked, he is of purer eyes than to behold evil; yet if God should have no love where corruption is, he would have no objects of favour among the children of men. He can distinguish (though men cannot, or will not) betwixt sinners and sinners, penitent and impenitent; he knows and regards his own image, though he hates and rejects Satan's; he favours his children, though all defiled, he respects his jewels in the mire; Christ's spouse is at the same time both black and comely. Consider the poor soul deformed with the relics of sin, O how unsightly it is! but look on the beginnings of grace in sincerity, O how desirable! Sin repented of, and abhorred, shall not hinder God's favour. Nay,

2. God hath greatest favour for him who has least favour for himself; he had most respect to penitent Job, who abhorred himself in dust and ashes. A self-loathing soul is a God-respected soul, Ezek. xvi. 63. God is most pacified, when the Christian's face is most ashamed, this self-confusion is both a fruit and evidence of God's favour; see Ezek. xx. 41, 43. xxxvi. 25—31. When thou hast least charity for thyself, God hath most for thee; when thou art most vile in thine own eyes, thou art most fair in his; this is no small mystery, grace vilifies a man to himself, magnifies him to God; at the same time when a man thinks himself the worst, God owns him as the best of men, and yet neither misseth, nor mistaketh in judging, for the soul's eyes being open, he sees his own vileness; but God who searcheth the heart, knows that by him, which he can scarce discern in himself, and through dissatisfaction with his corrupt heart will not believe is in him, so "He that shall humble himself, shall be exalted," Matt. xxiii. 12.

Obj. How can I have God's favour that feel it not,

cannot experience it, know it not, believe it not? surely, it is not possible a soul should be in God's favour, and not know it?

Ans. 1. You must distinguish betwixt God's favour to the soul, and a sense of it in the soul. David complains of broken bones, of God's hiding his face, withdrawing himself; so doth Job, Heman, yea, our Saviour. Divines distinguish betwixt salvation, and the joy of salvation. Psalm li. 12, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation:" the having of grace, and the feeling of grace are different things; a man in a swoon hath life, but is not sensible of it in some cases; God doth sometimes for wise ends suspend the manifestation of his favour from a gracious soul, as a father will do from his child, and as Joseph did from his brethren.

2. This variety of experience doth rather evidence God's favour, than the contrary; sick fits are incident only to men alive; they have child-like dispositions who understand the nature of God's withdrawals; it was a David that could say, "Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled." Genuine love is accompanied with many jealousies; ebbings and flowings are the attendants of sea-faring men; uphill and down is the road to heaven. Think not to be always dandled in God's arms, or laid in his bosom; remember you are on earth, not in heaven; your sun may be often under a cloud, your appetites must not be always gratified with dainties. It is natural for God's children in some cases to question God's love: merely formal presumers will hardly be brought to question God's favour, are ordinarily in one uniform, settled state, and go on dreaming in a fool's paradise; or if they should question it, they silence a clamorous conscience with worldly salvos, or phantastic delusions.

Obj. But alas, how can I think that God favours

me, when I cannot love him? Is not God's love seconded with our love to him, as the genuine reflection of his lovely rays? 1 John iv. 19.

Ans. 1. You must distinguish betwixt the direct and the reflex actings of grace. It is one thing to exercise grace, another to know that this is indeed the genuine exercise of sincere grace: the grace of love may be hid in the Christian's heart, as well as God's favour hid under a cloud. Spiritual life may be hid, Col. iii. 3, even from the Christian's own view, as well as from others' discovery; desertions, temptations, and corruptions may darken and damp a pious soul's evidences of grace.

2. But look again and rake up the ashes, and see if thou canst not find some spark of love; feel thy pulse again, and feel it steadily, and see if it beat not truly, though faintly; thou wouldst lie still as a stone, if the the cords of love did not draw thee; thou wouldst be as dead as a corpse, if the sun of God's favour did not quicken thee. What? is not God's love shed abroad in thy heart? * canst thou not love him, though absent, though unseen? † But I shall wave this, as having spoken to it before.

Other objections might be mentioned, (as indeed there is no end of a doubting soul's querulous complaints, when Satan raiseth hard thoughts of God in us) such as this: if God hath any favour for me, why doth he not take off this affliction, or bestow upon me this or that good which I want? I answer, it is because his favour is towards thee; God may deny a mercy to some in favour, and give a mercy to others in wrath; affliction is adopted to be a covenant mercy, Psalm lxxxix. 32. But God may give wicked men their own desire, Psalm lxxviii. 29; and mingle that

* Rom. v. 5.

† 1 Pet. i. 8.

gift with wrath, verse 31. The Father knows what is good for the child better than the child himself, and if he give in favour, he will give every good thing, Psalm lxxxiv. 11. A man in a fever would have strong drink, which would increase his disease, but his attendant is wise: God is a faithful keeper, a merciful preserver; it is a favour that God will rather deny than gratify our fond desires in some things; he often doth us good against our wills.

O but, saith the soul, if God favour me, why doth he suffer me to be harassed with such violent temptations and raging corruptions? I answer, it is neither want of power or love in God towards his children, but for wise ends, even to make them humble and self-denying, and to lead them to see a daily need of recourse to Christ, to induce them to maintain grace in lively exercise, to animate them to keep up spiritual warfare, and finally to make the conquest more glorious, death more desirable, and heaven more welcome.

2. Cases of conscience are such as these:—

Query, Doth not faith consist in the assurance of God's favour? I have heard some say so, and if so, I have no faith.

Answ. That is a mistake: assurance of God's favour is not of the essence, but a blessed effect of faith; hence it is called the assurance of faith, Heb. x. 22. There may be sincere faith without it, as many Scripture instances demonstrate: Psalm xxii. 1. lxxxviii. 1, 14. Isa. i. 10. Sealing comes after believing, Eph. i. 13; for faith consists in an assent of the mind to gospel revelations, and a consent of the will to take Christ upon his own terms, as he is held forth in the gospel, 1 Tim. i. 15. John i. 12.

Qu. But how can a soul exercise faith on God, that

wants assurance of God's favour? what ground hath he for faith?

Ans. We may exercise faith without a particular assurance: Job xiii. 15. Psalm xiii. 1, 5. cxliii. 7, 8. So the woman of Canaan did, Matt. xv. 22—28. Because the ground of faith is not providences, but promises; not sense and feeling of God's special love at present, but secret confidence built upon a revelation of God's power and willingness to save, and his gracious conduct towards others: so that a person knowing his misery and necessity, and understanding God's mercy and faithfulness, ventures himself on God in the way of believing.

Qu. What may be the reason why the Lord sometimes withdraws the sense of his favour from his children?

Ans. God hath many wise and gracious ends in this dispensation. A skilful physician gives vomits and purgatives, to work out bad humours, and to create a more healthful constitution of body: God's children oft grow careless and irregular, and provoke God to withdraw the sense of his love and favour, in consequence of which he inflicts this darkness as their punishment. This was David's case here, God punished his carnal confidence by withdrawment, Psalm xxx. 7; so Isa. lvii. 17. I might mention many gracious purposes that God hath in hiding his face, for promoting the good of his children, as,

1. To awaken them out of drowsiness and security, Cant. v. 3, 4.

2. To humble their hearts, and prevent pride, 2 Cor. xii. 7.

3. To prepare them for comfort, 2 Cor. i. 5. In nature God works by contraries, so in grace he brings to heaven by the confines of hell.

4. To wean their hearts from the world, to which they are too much attached, Psalm cxix. 36. Letters and tokens of love are oft intercepted, that we may love and long more for home.

5. To raise their hearts to a higher esteem of God's favour, quickening their diligence in seeking him, promoting their care and endeavour to hold him fast, Cant. iii. 1—5.

6. That after these sad shakings, their hearts may be more fully settled and established upon better grounds, 1 Pet. v. 10.

7. To teach them to pity, pray for, and relieve others in such a state of desertion, Heb. ii. 17, 18.

Another case of conscience is, whether assurance of God's favour can be attained, and in what way?

Ans. This is a grave and extensive subject, I can but advert to it. There is no question but assurance of God's favour is attainable, and it is a fault in those that think it is presumption to desire or seek for it. It is commanded, 2 Pet. i. 10. It is promised, Ezek. xxxiv. 30. John xiv. 21. It hath been attained, Rom. viii. 15, 16. 1 John iv. 16. The way to obtain it is not peculiar or restricted to some individuals, but common to all believers in all ages; for it is inferred by a practical syllogism, thus: He that sincerely believes, repents, and loves God, is in God's favour; but, saith the soul, I sincerely believe, repent, and love God, therefore I am in God's favour. The *major* is a Scripture assertion, therefore an infallible truth: John iii. 15. Acts iii. 19. 1 John iii. 14, 18, 19. The *minor* is a Christian's own experience, the workings of grace in his heart: 2 Cor. iii. 17. Heb. x. 34. The consequence is very clearly drawn from the premises; make out these, and the conclusion will follow evidently; therefore I am in God's favour, and shall be saved.

Qu. Why then do so few attain assurance of God's favour?

Answ. It is difficult though possible, and few will be at the pains to use God's appointed means, or stay God's leisure for obtaining assurance; many are ignorant, and know not how to set about self-trial; others melancholy, and are not able to distinguish aright, or to make rational deductions; many blur their evidences by sinning; others have a defect of faith, or too much prevalence of unbelief in their hearts, are surprised with slavish fears and jealousies, and are apt to think it is too good news to be true; others give way to the world, which interposeth between the sun of God's favour and their souls; Satan buffets some with sad temptations, and God leaves others under desertion for gracious ends. For we must (with most Divines) distinguish betwixt a Christian's gradual assurance of God's favour, which is upon a discovery of gracious habits in the soul and actings of grace, and that which is intuitive, that is, which flows from the more immediate shinings of God's face, or sealings of his Spirit, wherein God as a free agent vouchsafes or suspends these tokens of love, as he sees good; and though it be a truth that God must shine upon the graces of his Spirit in our hearts, or we cannot have assurance of his favour, yet usually the reason of our want of assurance is our own negligence, not using or carelessly using the means for attaining thereof. If you ask me, what are the ordinary means that a Christian must use for obtaining assurance of God's favour, I shall but mention four.

1. Diligent attendance upon God's ordinances, and looking up to God in all his appointments, such as hearing the word, Psal. lxxxix. 15; religious conference, Cant. iii. 3. 1 Thess. v. 14; earnest prayer, John xvi.

24. Only use these conscientiously and constantly, and you will see the happy effect.

2. Solemn self-examination. It may be there is something amiss in your hearts and lives, for which God withdraws; O search and find it out, mourn over it, procure a pardon of it, and a thorough reconciliation, Job xiii. 23, 24. God loves to smile upon humbled souls, James iv. 6, 10. 2 Cor. vii. 6. Isa. lvii. 15.

3. Reflection on experience, Psalm lxxvii. 5, 10. cxlv. 4, 5. It becomes Christians to keep a register of God's dealings with their hearts, and when they are in the dark to look it over, Psal. xlii. 6; and the reason is, because if ever thou wast in God's favour, thou art still in his favour; see John xiii. 1. That is a remarkable text Jer. xxxi. 3, which some render thus, "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me," that is, say they, it is true, God formerly made many gracious discoveries of himself to our ancestors, but now he hideth himself, and hath forsaken us; but, saith the Lord, I have loved thee with an everlasting love, as if he had said, it is not transient or temporal favour, but from, and to all eternity; therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee.

4. Walking in ways well-pleasing to God, conformity of life and heart to God's will, a constant care to please God, and fear to offend him, are both means and evidence of God's favour, Psalm xxv. 14. Mal. iv. 2. Psal. lxxxv. 9. It is impossible you should have a right assurance of God's favour, if you favour any sin; yea, let a godly man yield to sin, and presently the evidence of God's favour is lost and withdrawn; for sin separates betwixt a people and their God, Isa. lix. 2. This interposes as a thick mist to hide his face from us; if your hearts grow secure and worldly, sitting loose from God, letting down your watch, or remitting

diligence in duty; presently, if you be sensible, you will find God withdrawing the light of his countenance from your souls; for God will not manifest himself to those that make not conscience of close and holy walking.

II. Something I should say to those that do enjoy the sweet sunshine of God's favour, and feel the sense of it in their hearts. I shall but briefly advert to your duty.

1. Be very thankful, and praise God for causing his candle to shine upon thy head, for all men have not God's special favour; thou hast no right to it by nature; thou didst not deserve it for any thing thou hast done; thou hast often forfeited it; many thousands go out of God's blessings into the warm sun, and willingly leave our Father's table to feed upon husks; most of the world are willingly put off with a few scraps of worldly enjoyments. Luther calls the whole Turkish empire but a crumb cast to dogs. O but this is the children's bread, bless God, and say as Mephibosheth to David, Who am I that the Lord should look on such a dead dog as I am? what shall I render to the Lord for this benefit? O for a thankful heart; Lord, pardon my base ingratitude.

2. Walk worthy of this privilege, lay up experiences of God's favour, as Mary laid up the angel's sayings in her heart, or as friends lay up tokens of love carefully, we use to preserve deeds of moment locked up, seals are put under special protection that they may not be broken. O look well to evidences of God's love, they may stand you in stead, as Tamar produced her pledges to Judah. O abuse not God's favour by sinning, turn not his grace into licentiousness; Hanun's abuse of David's kindness, you know, brought forth a war, and truly God often reckons the abuse of his favour as a

matter of controversy against Israel of old, see Jer. ii. 2, 5, 9. Mic. vi. 2—5; and indeed the abusing of his love goes to his very heart. Act consistently with your obligations to him, seeking to please, and being afraid to offend him, charging yourselves and others that you beware of interrupting your comfort, or disturbing the repose he hath in you, Cant. ii. 7. Observe you are in the greatest danger of falls immediately after the receipt of the sweetest tokens of favour, therefore be watchful daily to maintain a holy jealousy over your hearts, that you sin not, and that you provoke not God's displeasure.

3. Improve God's favour for the good of others; produce instances thereof, saying, "Come all ye that fear God, and I will shew you what he hath done for my soul," Psal. lxvi. 16. Speak to your children, servants, neighbours and companions, and urge them to taste and see how good the Lord is; recommend his service from your own experience; tell them how sweet you have found the light of God's countenance, how attainable and endearing God's favour is, and by what means they may get a share therein; but above all, plead for this to all about you. A godly man being a long time in a secret place in prayer, when he came forth with an unusual cheerfulness, he told some around him that he had that day obtained mercy for himself and all his family, which was accordingly true, for all his children proved truly pious; and indeed it is a fit season to pour out our hearts before God, that others may experience mercy, as Abraham did, "O that Ishmael may live in thy sight." For a soul that is in favour with God can prevail much with him; a Moses intimate with God in the mount, may be a powerful advocate to stand in the gap and prevail with God, that favour may be shown to the church. The famous Mr. Welsh, a

godly Scotch minister, rose one night, and went into the garden ; his wife following him, heard a voice fervently uttered with sobs and tears, saying, "O God, wilt thou not give me Scotland? wilt thou not give me Scotland?" Afterwards he told her, "I have endured a great fight for Scotland this night, and hardly could I prevail to have a remnant reserved, yet he will be gracious." This, this is the season in which you must ply the throne of grace for favour to others. And O what a privilege is it to have our cases upon the hearts of such as are thus intimate with the Lord, as one said, when it shall be thus with thee, then remember me. *

4. Long and hope for heaven. Let the sweet sense and favour of God here, make your souls restless till you advance to the full and final fruition of it in glory; let these tastes make you long for a full draught ; let these rivers or streams lead you to the spring; let these beams attract you to the glorious Sun of righteousness, to him in whose presence is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore. In the morning of the resurrection when you awake, you shall be satisfied with his image, you will be content to go into your Father's palace. You are in a corner of heaven indeed, when you are solacing your souls in the divine embraces, but methinks it should be irksome to depart from so blessed and beautiful a place, and come down again into this loathsome dungeon of the world. However, be looking for, and hasting to the coming of our dear Lord, and trust him till then, and believe that he will preserve you to his heavenly kingdom. Some of God's servants have breathed their last in the sense and views thereof. There is a remarkable story of Mr. Robert Bruce, a very holy re-

* Cum sic tibi fuerit, memento mei.

verend minister, when he was very old, coming to breakfast one morning, and having eaten an egg, he said to his daughter, "I am yet hungry, bring me another egg;" he continuing in a deep meditation, said, "Hold, daughter, hold, my master calls," and his sight failing him, when he had called for a Bible, he bade them turn to the eighth of the Romans, saying, "Put my finger to ver. 38, *For I am persuaded that neither death*"—now saith he, "Is my finger upon those words?" when they told him it was, without any more he said, "Now God be with you my children, I have breakfasted with you, and shall sup with my Lord Jesus Christ this night," and so gave up the ghost. Which delightful death makes me think of the notion of some Jewish Rabbies upon Deut. xxxiv. 5, "Moses died—according to the word of the Lord," so we read it, but in Hebrew it is, "At the mouth of Jehovah," they say, at the kiss of the Lord;* those sweet embraces brought him to eternal embraces of the Lord. He is there called the servant of the Lord, not before, saith Aben Ezra; by this title is expressed the excellence of that estate at which he arrived, for the servant is still conversant with his master, enters into his secret conclave, is still ready at his beck, so did Moses freely yield himself to go to God at his call, and so should we. They have a saying, "That the righteous are greater in death than in life."† When the believer is separated from the body, he ministers to God perfectly in the heights of heaven, and he is also called God's servant at death, because he now goes to receive the full reward of his work in another world, as a faithful servant. In both these respects God's servants are privileged, for our Saviour saith, John xii. 26, "Where

* Ad osculum Jehovahæ.

† Majores sunt justi in morte quam in vitâ.

I am there shall also my servants be, and if any man serve me, him will my Father honour." And O the blessed reward of this service, Col. iii. 24, "Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance, for ye serve the Lord Christ." O faithful rewarder! O bountiful benefactor!

I shall close all with the following meditation, by way of paraphrase, on the text which I have endeavoured to explain and enforce through the whole of this treatise.*

The divine word informs me, and my own experience bears witness to the delightful truth, that "in his favour there is life." To this I can set my seal; so that what many others do but read, I, a poor sinful worm, am made to feel. Were I denied the sweet enjoyment of his favour, my heart would be pained; I should faint and languish. Had I never tasted the precious benefit, I should never have known how good it is. But I know in whom I have believed; I know whom I have loved; and how do I long that my weary soul may rest in the bosom of his love! His benignity is better than life. I long to have a full draught of his love, or rather, to be overwhelmed in this unbounded ocean.

Absence from him, whose favour has won my heart, is the sharpest pain I now feel. O that the veil, which hides from me the bright vision of his face, were but once removed! I long to see him as he is. Since his love has warmed my once-frozen breast, my heart is not my own; I have given my warmest affections to him, and cannot forbear to cry, "When shall I come, and appear before God!"

* Here the Editor takes the liberty of substituting Dr. Fawcett's paraphrase instead of the original. This however is the only instance in which he has ventured to take such liberty with his Author.

Farewell, delusive world ; my heart glows with an ardour which nothing beneath the sun could possibly inspire. The brightest things below the skies have no charms for me, in comparison with him who is the chief among ten thousands, and altogether lovely. The favour of the great, the riches of the wealthy, and the delights of the vain, are mean and despicable things. When the light of God's countenance is lifted up upon me, I can look on this captivating world with disdain, and deem the mightiest monarch poor, who knows nothing of the favour of the King of kings.

How am I indebted to the riches of infinite love ! The merciful Redeemer saw me, all wretched and forlorn, a helpless orphan, cast out in the open field, polluted in mine own blood, to the loathing of my person ; he pitied my helpless case, took me up in his arms, cherished me in his bosom, washed me from my filthiness, adorned me with his comeliness, and said unto me, " I have loved thee with an everlasting love." O how great is his mercy ! I am now emboldened to claim a personal interest in his favour, and to say, " My beloved is mine, and I am his." His love is absolutely free. There was enough in me to provoke his eternal abhorrence ; but he hath mercy on whom, and because he will have mercy.

Assist me, ye divine intelligences, ye angels of light, assist me to admire and adore his love. Teach me, in strains like your own, to celebrate the height, the depth, the length and the breadth of redeeming grace.

The tokens of divine favour are sweet beyond expression. They banish the fears and inquietudes of the pained heart ; they alleviate the crosses and afflictions of life, and brighten the horrors of death and the grave. Blest with the smiles of his face, who loved me, and gave himself for me, I can cheerfully submit

to every chastisement of his hand; knowing that whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. Welcome disease, welcome every pain, which indicates the speedy dissolution of this tabernacle, and portends the hour of my release from the burdens of the flesh. These breaches in the walls of my prison-house admit the rays of celestial light, and assure me, that my longing soul shall speedily gain her happy dismissal, and fly to the bosom of her Saviour. Go on, O Lord, to accomplish in me all the good pleasure of thy goodness, and the work of faith with power. Let thy light shine brighter and brighter, unto the perfect day. Then farewell groans, and tears, and complaints; farewell darkness and eclipses of the Sun of righteousness; farewell glimmering hopes and gloomy fears; faith itself will then be turned into sight, and hope into everlasting fruition. Welcome ye pleasures which flow at God's right hand for evermore! When I partake of these I shall know, that "IN HIS FAVOUR IS LIFE!"

ISRAEL'S
LAMENTATION

After the Lord.

AN
HUMBLE ADDRESS

TO THE
RIGHTEOUS GOD.

RIGHTEOUS art thou, O Lord, in all thy ways, and holy in all thy works, * must dust and ashes say when they speak to thee, or plead with thee. All our Israel have transgressed thy law, and despised thy gospel, therefore hast thou brought upon us a great evil, such as hath scarce ever been done under the whole heaven; † not three shepherds cut off in a month, ‡ but two thousands in one day, and this not for a day, or month, or year, but even twenty years already; neither is there any among us that knoweth how long this sad cloud may be upon us. || Thy will be done: thou hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve; but to the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against thee; and shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? § Look down from heaven, and behold from the habita-

* Psalm cxlv. 17. Jer. xii. 1. † Dan. ix. 11, 12.

‡ Zech. xi. 8. || Psalm lxxiv. 9.

§ Ezra ix. 13. Dan. ix. 9. Gen. xviii. 25.

tion of thy holiness, and of thy glory.* Shall the needy always be forgotten? shall the expectation of the poor perish for ever? † Be not wrath very sore, O Lord, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people; though our iniquities testify against us, do thou this for thy name's sake; for behold, for thy sake we are killed all the day long. ‡ The Lord God of hosts, the Lord God of gods, he knoweth, and Israel he shall know, if it be rebellion, or transgression against the Lord. || Judge, O Lord, them that have walked in their integrity: recompense thy servants according to the cleanness of their hands in thine eye-sight, that have not wickedly departed from their God; or, by the grace of God have acknowledged their offence, and returned to thee, and who at last are following on to know the Lord, and pleading and hoping for a reviving and resurrection after these days or years of death. § Let thy dead men live, thy slain witnesses be called up, and ascend to heaven in a cloud; let there be a shaking, that these dry bones may come together: come, O wind, and breathe on them, that they may live. ¶ Cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary, for the Lord's sake: in midst of judgment remember mercy, and at last revive thy work: give us the opening of the mouth: set thy light on a candlestick; hold the stars in thy right hand: let thy people's eyes see their teachers: give us help from trouble, for vain is the

* Isa. lxiii. 15.

† Psalm ix. 18.

‡ Isa. lxiv. 9. Jer. xiv. 7. Psalm xlv. 22.

|| Josh. xxii. 22.

§ Psalm xxvi. 1. Psalm xviii. 21, 24. Hos. v. 15. vi. 3.

¶ Isa. xxvi. 19. Rev. xi. 11, 12. Ezek. xxxvii. 6, 9.

help of man: purify the sons of Levi, that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness.* Thou art Jehovah, and changest not, therefore the sons of Jacob are not all consumed.† Thou art the Creator of the ends of the earth, and therefore canst command deliverance for Jacob.‡ There is no searching of thine understanding, therefore thou canst devise ways for the banished to be restored.|| Thou art a faithful God, and wilt perform thy promises, and confirm the word of thy servants.§ But our God is a God of judgment; blessed are all they that wait for him.¶ The true and faithful witness saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus. **

* Dan. ix. 17. Hab. iii. 2. Ezek. iii. 27. Matt. v. 15. Rev. ii. 1. Isa. xxx. 20. Psalm lx. 11. Mal. iii. 3.

† Mal. iii. 6.

‡ Psalm xlii. 8. xliv. 4.

|| 2 Sam. xiv. 14.

§ 1 Cor. x. 13. Isa. xliv. 26.

¶ Isa. xxx. 18.

** Rev. xxii. 20.

TO ALL
THE MOURNERS IN ZION,
THAT WAIT FOR
THE CONSOLATION OF ISRAEL,

Grace, mercy, and peace.

THE sharp rebukes which divine displeasure hath laid us under these many years, have caused various thoughts of heart. Whilst profane men have shot their arrows, bitter words, it is becoming God's children to have many solemn searchings of heart, and serious inquiries after the reason of the Lord's controversy with the daughter of Zion; word and rod call us to consider our ways,* and God's people have called on themselves and one another saying, "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord."† Doubtless the occasion is given by us, we turned away from God before he turned his back upon us. Judgment is begun at the house of God;‡ and he expects repentance should begin there, that pacification may be first begun there. God saith, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for your iniquities;"§ and well he may, for the provocation of his sons and daughters goes nearest his heart,§ as being against greater light, and love, means, mercies, obligations, and expectations than that of others. Surely it is high time for us to awake out of sleep.¶ The charge is drawn up, the indictment is read, scourges have been laid on, and of such a nature as have

* Hag i. 5.

|| Amos. iii. 2.

† Lam. iii. 40.

§ Deut. xxxii. 19.

‡ 1 Pet. iv. 17.

¶ Rom. xiii. 11.

come nearest the hearts of the godly. Loss of gospel privileges, is a greater affliction than loss of money, goods, houses, liberties, relations, even of life itself. God hath said, "Woe, also unto them when I depart from them."* He doth not use to depart till he be slighted, or thrust away. This hath been a long, dark and gloomy day, a day of rebuke and blasphemy, a day of scattering and treading down in the valley of vision. Ministers and their flocks rent asunder; solemn assemblies sorrowfully broken up; sad and silent sabbaths; by some profaned; ignorance increasing, conversion work suspended, sinners hardened, young beginners in religion discouraged, atheism abounding, persecution revived, and thousands of precious souls wandering about as sheep that have no shepherd: many public places being ill supplied, and guilt brought upon the nation, pressing us down towards destruction, yea such sins as leave a people remediless, mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, misusing his prophets, till the wrath of God arise against us, till there be no remedy, or no healing.† This brought Israel into captivity out of their own land. This also hath brought on the final scattering of that forlorn nation to this day, killing the Lord Jesus, as well as their own prophets, persecuting the apostles, and forbidding them to speak to the gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins always, in consequence of which wrath is come upon them to the uttermost;‡ and surely this lies nearest the hearts of real saints, next to God's glory and their own souls, that poor sinners should ruin themselves and destroy the nation. It is dreadful indeed to see debauchery in the land abounding, and the basest of men vent personal malice against God's dearest children for no other fault than worshipping God, and praying for their persecutors.

Men write voluminous treatises of invectives against us, charging us with schisms, sedition, faction, and rebellion, which God knows, our souls hate, and we durst appeal to our worst adversaries in their sober intervals that they cannot but know the contrary; and after all these long-lasting and heavy-pressing evils have come upon us, one harvest is passed, and many summers and winters ended, and we are not saved. || "As for us,

* Hos. ix. 12.

† 1 Thess. ii. 15, 16.

† 2 Chron. xxxvi. 16.

|| Jer. viii. 20.

our eyes as yet failed for our vain help: in our watching we have watched for a nation that cannot save us: * we looked for peace, but no good came; for a time of health, and behold trouble." † And we may discern God's anger in the wrath of men. But after all this, shall we sit still, and be stupid under the awful hand of God? Surely our work is not to complain of men, much less oppose them; but to look into our own hearts and lives by self-examination, and to practise humiliation, and reformation; for these vapours that darken the heavens, arise from our polluted hearts and lives, these arrows are winged with our own feathers, our destruction is of ourselves; ‡ it may be said to ever individual, thy way and thy doings have procured these things for thee, this is thy wickedness; because it is bitter, because it reacheth unto thine heart, even to thy soul. || Salvian complained of old, that by our sins the enemies were strong; this is the Achan in the camp, the Jonah in the ship, the worm at the gourd. If sin abide still in us, we cannot be safe; it is in vain to expect deliverance till the cause of the provocation on our part be discarded and purged away. It is true, God is the inflicting cause, wicked men the instruments, but our own selves are the deserving and procuring cause of all our woes. The protestants in queen Mary's days, lamented that their unprofitableness and contempt of the gospel, under king Edward sixth, brought on them their bloody days of persecution; and if we do not mourn, and reform, we may conclude that these are but the beginnings of sorrow, as drops before the shower of blood; that after this prophesying in sackcloth, witnessess shall be slain, the number of martyrs accomplished, and Antichrist's sins filled up, by setting up the abomination of desolation, which God Almighty prevent!

These things considered, and often revolved in my thoughts, I cast about to ascertain what was the fittest course to be taken for preventing God's further removes, and to bring him back to our souls, and assemblies:—and I find that,

1. God purposely removes to make us follow him, as a wise nurse doth by a weak child. §

2. He stops and halts, as in suspense what to do, that he

* Lam. iv. 17.

|| Jer. iv. 18.

† Jer. viii. 15.

§ Hos. v. 15.

‡ Hos. xiii. 9.

may both alarm us, and afford us leisure to consider what course to take.*

3. He makes a gracious promise, that if we do follow on to know the Lord, his going forth shall be prepared as the morning.† And

4. He complaineth that there is none that calleth on his name, that stirreth up himself to take hold on God,‡ that is, to keep him from departing, or to fetch him back.

Considering the premises, I was desirous in my poor measure, to promote God's work in the souls of his people, and engage all that have any interest in God, to improve it at this day, for the preventing of his total removal, and detaining of God with us; not as the inhabitants of Tyre, when Alexander besieged it; and one of their diviners told them, it was revealed to him in a dream, that Apollo their god, was shortly to depart from them, on which they took the image of Apollo, and bound it with a chain of gold to a post, thinking thereby to detain him. No, no, we cannot force God against his will to tarry; but we are in obedience to God's command, in discharging of our duty, and in performance of the condition of his promise, to lament after the Lord, with prayers, tears, confessions, and reformation, pleading with God through the intercession of his Son, for his return and residence with us. While wicked Gadarenes are by words and works bidding the blessed Jesus depart out of our coasts, it becomes us solemnly to invite him, to open the doors of our hearts to him, and give him free welcome, saying, "Lord abide with us;" and thus he may be constrained to tarry with us.¶ And though in this dreadful tempest, with which the ship of the church is sorely tossed, so that it is covered with waves, our Lord be asleep,§ yet faith and prayer will awaken him; and though we cannot peremptorily say, he will save our persons, or privileges, or his church in England, yet we may with some confidence say, he will certainly save Zion, and build his church some where in the world; he will save our own souls, and it may be, we shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger; it may be, that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.¶¶

* Hosea xi. 3.

† Hosea vi. 3.

‡ Isa. lxiv. 7.

¶ Luke xxiv. 29.

§ Matt. viii. 24, 25.

¶ Zeph. ii. 3. Amos v. 15.

Who knoweth if he will return, and repent, and leave a blessing behind him? * Even a heathen king took this course, and upon no other assurance, than *Who can tell?* there is hope in Israel concerning this thing; † only it becomes us to wait God's leisure, and with patience, yea, with fortitude pass through the fiery trial before us; wherein Papists will far exceed Protestants in rage. However Mr. Greenham said, "He that will suffer by Papists, must learn to suffer by Protestants; and he that hath well passed the pikes in camp fight, may hope to pass safe through the fire-ordeal." Integrity and uprightness will preserve us, seconded by a divine support in sharpest trials. "The God of all grace, who hath called you unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. ‡

May it please the Lord to own these weak, though seasonable labours, for quickening the spirits of his people to lament after the Lord; it may be, he will return to the many thousands of his people in these nations; and after we have been digging *ezek* and *sitnah*, || he may cause us unanimously to dig *rehoboth*, § that the Lord may make room for us, and make us fruitful in the land. O for such a day! There is a day coming wherein nothing shall hurt or destroy in all God's holy mountain; wherein the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, &c. ¶ wherein his people shall see eye to eye, and serve him with one consent, or shoulder, when he will turn to his people a pure language, and when they shall lie down, and none shall make them afraid. ** It becomes God's people to make a catalogue of these and such like promises, and spread them before the Lord; for he is a faithful God, and will perform his promise, which saith, Jer. xxx. 17, "I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the Lord, because they called thee an out-cast, saying, This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after:" and let all that love her say, Amen. "Then the angel of the Lord, answered and said, O Lord of hosts! how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem, and on the cities of Judah, against

* Joel ii. 14.

† Jonah iii. 7—9. Ezra x. 2.

‡ 1 Peter v. 10.

|| Strife and hatred, Gen. xxvi. 20—22.

§ Room.

¶ Isa. xi. 6—9.

** Zeph. iii. 9, 13.

which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years. And the Lord answered the angel that talked with me, with good words, and comfortable words." *

That this may be the issue of this dispensation, intercession, and lamentation, is the heart prayer of,

Thy soul's friend,

O. HEYWOOD.

Aug. 22. 1682.

* Zech. i. 12, 13.

ISRAEL'S LAMENTATION

After the Lord.

1 SAM. vii. 2.

——— *And all the house of Israel lamented after
the Lord.*

CHAP. I.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

THE whole series of the history of the times in which this scripture was written, may be thus briefly detailed : After the Judges mentioned in the preceding book, called by their name, God raised up Eli, who was both a judge and priest, and though he was a good man himself, yet his sons were profane, and oppressed the people, by requiring both boiled flesh and raw for roasting, and abusing the women that came to the door of the tabernacle ; so that their sin was very great and of bad consequence, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord. * Eli being informed of his sons' profligate course, too much indulged, or too mildly rebuked them ; “ Why,” said he, “ do you such things ?” † too

* 1 Sam. ii. 12—17.

† 1 Sam. ii. 23. Defects in this reproof.—*Polirit. in loc. Ser. 10.*

soft words for such hard and heinous acts : there wanted deeds, he being a magistrate ought to have punished or removed them, if not put them to death. Well, a man of God is sent to Eli,* whether Phinehas, or Elkanah, or an angel, I dispute not, to rebuke and threaten him and his house ; but he not reforming, God inspires and commissions young Samuel to give him a severe admonition, and warn him as immediately from the Lord.† The good old man falls under the admonition though given by a child, but now the disease was grown past his curing, his counsel did no good, and he could not correct them ; no doubt he acknowledged his fault, and since it would be no better, he puts the matter over into God's hands : " Let him do what seemeth him good."‡ God can by his grace curb and cure them, or by his power he can crush and confound them : let him use his pleasure, I give my children into his hands : let my Lord get to himself a name of glory by them or upon them, I freely submit. A speech becoming a man of God and religious priest. Well, God himself undertakes to deal with them : in the fourth chapter,|| the Israelites and Philistines join battle, four thousand Israelites are slain, the ark is sent for into the camp ; the law on the tables within it had been broken, yet the ark must be their palladium. They doted on the ark, but provoked the God of the ark : they repent not of their corrupt manners, or pollution of God's worship ; they neither used outward means by recruiting their army, which was a tempting of God, nor do they use proper religious means, to obtain reconciliation with God ; but fondly presume upon God's lenity and indulgence to them, because of the mere presence of the ark. The ark comes, Hophni and Phinehas carry it, Israel shout for joy, the Philis-

* 1 Sam. ii. 27. † 1 Sam. iii. 13. ‡ Ibid. || 1 Sam. iv. 2—4.

tines animate one another, imagining, if they now prevailed, they conquered the God of Israel, looking on the ark to be Israel's idol, or at least, that God's power was restricted to it, after the conceit of idolaters ; they fight, prevail, and kill thirty thousand Hebrews, with Hophni and Phinehas, take the ark as a prize, the tidings whereof broke Eli's heart, then his neck, brought pangs on Phinehas's wife, and though she was a mother, yet full of grief, (which she bequeathed to the world in the name of her surviving child, Ichabod) she expired.* Well, the Philistines now lead Israel's God in triumph, as they judge ; they bring it to Dagon their god in Ashdod, for a reproach to the true God :† but the triumphing of the wicked is short. Though Israel be a loser, yet Dagon and his worshippers are no gainers by the ark of God's presence : Dagon falls on his face, prostrate in homage thereto, beaten on his own dunghill ; being erected again, his head and hands were knocked off by another fall ;‡ so that now he had neither wit nor strength to help himself—the fair Venus or female part was gone, the fishy part only is left. But this was but a sport in comparison of what befell Dagon's worshippers, for God's hand was heavy on them all :|| as the Spartan boy carried the fox in his bosom till the animal tore his vitals, so did the inhabitants of Ashdod. The ark which brought life to those who venerated it, brought death upon despisers ; even as the Lord's supper is profitable to due partakers, but unworthy receivers find it to turn to their judgment here, and eternal misery hereafter. § Carnal hearts pretend a fond respect for ordinances, but find the Lord a jealous God upon their perverting his institutions or unsuitable carriage. Ashdod was soon weary of God's

* 1 Sam. iv. 9—21.

† 1 Sam. v. 1, 2.

‡ 1 Sam. v. 3, 4.

|| 1 Sam. v. 6.

§ 1 Cor. xi. 29.

ark; they hold a council of their lords; they post it away to Gath, which was their metropolis, thinking belike, that to be a better air, or under a more benign influence of the stars: but here also God's hand was upon them with a great destruction, they had painful and incurable emerods in their secret parts.* Being weary of the ark, they would shift it off to Ekron, but the Ekronites were wise by others' calamities:† and a consultation was held, the result of which was that they should carry back the ark into its place,‡ for all the five cities of the Philistines were sharply punished, the seven months it had been in their country. And they were weary of it; only they must consult the diviners how to send it back, and their advice was to send it with a trespass-offering,|| namely, five golden emerods and five golden mice, upon a new cart, drawn by two milch kine, that thus they might give glory to the God of Israel; and they signified that by the direction the cattle took, it might be known whether it was God's hand or a chance, and peradventure they might be healed. They did so: the kine went straight to Bethshemesh, a city of the Levites,§ they rejoiced to see it coming, but though they offered a burnt-offering to the Lord, yet looking into the ark, the Lord smote fifty thousand and threescore and ten men with death; and they lamented it, and cried out, "Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?"¶ But alas, they lament not their sacrilege and injury to the ark, but the death of their people; imitating the Philistines, they howled for the punishment, not kindly mourning for their offences; ** they reflected not on their own miscarriages, but transferred the cause to God's holi-

* 1 Sam. v. 9.

† 1 Sam. v. 10.

‡ 1 Sam. vi. 2.

|| 1 Sam. vi. 4.

§ 1 Sam. vi. 12.

¶ 1 Sam. vi. 19, 20.

** Qui propter culpas non dolebant, sed propter pœnas ululabant.

ness; and now they also would be glad to be rid of so chargeable guest, and send messengers to Kirjath-jearim, that the people there might fetch it to them, who came and brought it.

Query, Why did they not send it to Shiloh, where it was before?

Ans. 1. That was far off, this near, and they were in haste to get delivered of a burden.

2. Divine providence removes its favour from Shiloh, for the impiety thereof, Jer. vii. 12. You see ordinances are not perpetually entailed on one place: the gospel is a flitting gospel; God sometimes breaks up house, and is gone to another residence, Psal. lxxviii. 67, 68. Matt. xxi. 43.

Qu. Why were not they of Kirjath-jearim afraid of Bethshemesh's punishment?

Ans. They probably knew that the plague was not for the ark's sake, but to punish irreverence and curiosity; now they resolve to reform that, and take warning as David did, 1 Chron. xv. 13. It becomes persons that suffer in ordinances, not to find fault with God or them, but to charge it on themselves, and amend what is amiss; men's own sins are the exciting cause of God's indignation, the imposing cause of troubles. That is a good scholar, who learns these two lessons under God's hand.

I shall not trouble you with enumerating the several places in which the ark rested amongst the Israelites before it was brought by David into Obed-edom's house, 2 Sam. vi. 10; nor attempt to explain what is meant by the sanctifying of Eleazar, or ordaining him to the sacred ministry; what the keeping of the ark is, that nothing be taken away, or no unbecoming thing be done to it, or about it; nor why Eleazar the son, and not Abinadab the father was employed about

it. Whether Abinadab was old and decrepid, or dead, or busy about some household affairs, or Eleazar was more holy, it is not material for us to inquire. But it may be asked, whether the ark was only twenty years there? I answer, the ark was there all the days of Saul, which was above forty years,* but this was the twentieth, till the time of Samuel's giving the exhortation recorded in the following verse; or before Israel much inquired after it, or were sensible of their loss: so deeply were the roots of impiety and idolatry fastened in them.

The text contains, first, the ark's recess; and secondly, Israel's repentance.

Relative to the ark's recess observe, that the place was Kirjath-jearim, and more particularly, Abinadab's house, ver. 1, 2; and that the time or duration of its recess was twenty years—a long time indeed.

Some inquiries may here be proposed:—

1. What is meant by the ark here?

Ans. It is needless to explain the word אָרֹן which signifieth a chest, or coffin for the inclosing of a corpse, Gen. i. 26, or coffer for the deposit of money, 2 Kings xii. 10; but this ark was the place appointed by God, where the tables of the law were laid up, therefore called the ark of the testimony; there God communed with Israel, hence called the ark of his presence, Exod. xxv. 22: here the people of Israel were to worship and inquire God's mind, and it guided their journeyings, Numb. x. 35, 36. And though the ark have many significations, yet good expositors think that what the ark of God was to the Israelites of old, that the gospel ordinances are to us; which are means of grace, tokens of God's presence, and institutions of worship.

* Acts xiii. 21.

2. What is meant by the ark's being in Abinadab's house in Kirjath-jearim?

Ans. It imports its privacy, and solitude, that is, comparatively speaking, few could, and still fewer would frequent it, which was not the case formerly at Shiloh.

(1.) Because this city was near the Philistines upon the borders of the land, and so the other tribes could not so commodiously resort to it for devotion, or they durst not, lest the Philistines should set upon them, if any numbers came together for that purpose, as indeed they did, verse 7. Never is the devil and his imps more enraged against religious people, than when they meet to worship God: for the Philistines had interdicted Israel to meet together, and now they suspect them of sedition and rebellion.

(2.) Because the ark being but in a private house, few could meet there at once to worship God, or hear the word: some, it is possible, cared not for it, and had other ways of their own hearts which they followed: others had a month's mind to it, but being aged or infirm, could not get thither, or continue comfortably before the Lord there, but were subject to many inconveniences: others also were afraid of the scoffs and reproaches of their adversaries, and few would be at the pains to go and attend on God in his appointments.

3. Had the people no public ordinances or instructions all this time?

Ans. It is likely that they had ordinary Levites and priests to offer sacrifices, and instruct the people, though in the time of several judges, there was sad work both in civil and spiritual affairs; sometimes there was no king or public magistrate in Israel, and then every man did that which was right in his own

eyes : * hence Micah gets a house of graven images, and a Levite to be his priest, Judg. xvii. 5—13. Certainly, there was sad ignorance and woful degeneracy into impiety and idolatry, as is apparent from many instances.

Expositors observe but two inspired individuals, in all the time of the judges, which was 450 years, Acts xiii. 20: the one was Deborah a prophetess, Judg. iv. 4, and that prophet mentioned Judg. vi. 8; excepting that angel that came up from Gilgal to Bochim, chap. ii. 1. So that Peter begins to number the prophets from Samuel, Acts iii. 24, and Paul mentions Samuel the prophet as not an ordinary person; he indeed broke forth like a glorious sun out of the night of darkness, both of sin and error; and till those days the word of the Lord was precious, 1 Sam. iii. 1, that is, it was rare, because there were few prophets to declare God's word to the people; rarely did the Lord reveal himself, and therefore was it the more precious and highly esteemed by all. But that passage saith further, there was no open vision, this seems to be an interpretation of my text: no vision diffused or spread abroad, common or multiplied, but shut up within a fence, pale, or walls—so the word signifies, no broken vision. † A loaf that is whole, nourisheth not; a book closed up instructs not; a fountain shut up waters not; the open preaching of the word distributes it abroad to all parts, and members of the mystical body: this is the multiplication of seeds, this is bread distributed, as in Christ's miracles, amongst thousands. But alas, there was none to break the bread of life to souls, till Samuel arose, and then the word of Samuel came to all Israel,

* Judg. xvii. 6. xviii. 1. xix. 1. xxi. 25.

† אין חוון נפרע, à פרע, i. e. copiose producere.

1 Sam. iv. 1. He now preached repentance to all, and an expedition was formed against the Philistines; however, for want of reformation it proved unsuccessful, but that evil was brought on them to promote their humiliation: possibly Samuel foretold this fall to them as a punishment of their sin.

And now Samuel renews his exhortation,* Providence producing an argument from their catastrophe, to enforce the duty of repentance; and though this lamenting after the Lord be mentioned before this sermon, yet it is probable it was the consequence thereupon, as their reformation also was, ver. 4, yea, it may be this is the same with their drawing water, and pouring it out before the Lord, ver. 6, which some understand of penitent tears.†

Take some general observations from the context thus explained:

1. God gives his people sensible tokens of his special presence; the visible ark, and an audible voice betoken spiritual, invisible grace.

2. God thinks good sometimes to withdraw himself, and hide these tokens of his presence from a professing people.

3. This withdrawing may be continued a long time, 2 Chron. xxix. 8; as in Babylon, Zech. i. 12; and in the latter days, Hos. iii. 4.

4. God takes particular notice of the duration of his church's affliction, in Egypt 400 years, so Rev. xi. 11.

5. People's privileges may be long removed before they be penitently sensible of their loss, long before their restoration.

6. When God's ordinances are but privately dispensed, it is a great loss to the body of a people, such as need them most, have them least of them.

* 1 Sam. vii. 3.

† Vid. Pol. Syn. in loc.

7. Continuance in sin postpones deliverance, and absence of the ark or ordinances is an occasion of continuing in sin. Men do withdraw their hearts from God, that is, sinful; God withdraws helps from them, that is, penal; men repent not ordinarily without helps; God denies helps, and is just therein.

8. Attendance on ordinances raiseth the envy of wicked men. This hath been the occasion of quarrel from the days of Cain and Abel, successively to this day,* Gen. iv. 5. Exod. ix. 1. Ezra iv. 12, 13. Gal. iv. 29. Esther iii. 8. Dan. iii. 12. vi. 13.

9. One stirring active instrument for God, may by God's blessing, promote repentance and reformation amongst a people. O what hurt may one sinner do! so what good may one useful man do when God stirs up his heart. Samuel sets things forwards and puts them into motion, so Ezra v. 1, 2. Hag. i. 12.

10. When God designs a reformation and restitution of his ordinances, he orders a harmonious concurrence of providences for that end. The accomplishment of God's threats affright and awaken. Samuel comes at the critical moment, and speaks words upon the wheel. God moves, and things go on apace, 2 Chron. xxix. 36. xxxi. 21.

These I pass briefly, and proceed to the main point in the last clause of the verse, *And all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.*

They did not lament so much under their pressing burdens, and grievous oppressions by the Philistines, as after the Lord, that is, for the ark of the Lord and the Lord of the ark, for the recovery of God's gracious presence and the visible tokens thereof; they bitterly lamented the calamity of church and state, religion

* 1 Kings xviii.

and polity.* This, say interpreters, is a remarkable passage, because it informs us of the general conversion and repentance of a whole people; we have scarce the like in all the scripture, except Acts ii.

From the words then results this doctrine:—That when God's ark is long in obscurity, or ordinances are obstructed, it becomes God's Israel, or professing people, to lament after the Lord.

Serious lamenting after God is well becoming those whom God afflicts with the loss of privileges. The text presents to us,

1. The persons lamenting—God's peculiar people. These only love, and mind God's presence; when the lords and cities of the Philistines are weary of him and send him away, yea and the inhabitants of Bethshemesh, though a city of the Levites belonging to the church of God, through their ill management of matters send to get a release, yet God's Israel will look after their God.

2. Here is the object they lament after—not peace, plenty, or victory over enemies, but after the Lord. Jehovah is the object of their affections; it is he whom they love, and with whom they long for communion. Psal. lxiii. 1, 2, “O God,” saith David, “thou art my God, early will I seek thee, my soul thirsteth for thee to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.”

3. Here is the universality of the number—all Israel. The whole house of Israel come; they that had wofully degenerated, and had gone after their idols; what a wonderful act of God's power and sovereignty was this upon their spirits? by this he manifests that he is the true God, and that Samuel was his servant;

* *Lachrymis deplorârunt summam miseriam religionis et rei-publicæ.*

something similar observe in Elijah's prayer, preaching, sacrifice, and success, 1 Kings xviii. 21, 37, 39.

4. You have here the manner and nature of the people's repentance—they lamented after the Lord. Which is a very comprehensive word, and I shall explain it presently.

CHAP. II.

EXPLICATION OF THE PASSAGE UNDER CONSIDERATION.

IN discussing this subject I shall proceed in the following method:—

1. Shew how ordinances are obstructed, become obscured or tarnished.

2. What is implied in lamenting after the Lord.

3. How and why God's Israel thus lament.

4. Answer an objection, and then make application.

First, What is it for ordinances to be either obstructed, or in a state of obscurity, both of which circumstances may be a great affliction to God's people and oft occasion a lamentation.

1. For ordinances to be obstructed is a prevention of the liberty of dispensing them, and suppression of those who dispense them, by imprisonment, banishment, inhibition or suspension; as in Ahab's days, Jezebel cut off many prophets of the Lord, while the rest were hid by fifty in a cave, and fed with bread and water, 1 Kings xviii. 4; yea such scarcity was there at that day, that Elijah thought he was left alone, 1 Kings xix. 10, such as were left were latent,

and had indeed their lives preserved, but not liberty to proclaim the word, or to celebrate God's ordinances openly. It is true, truth seeks not corners; yet publishers of truth may be driven into corners. God's candles may be put under a bushel; the church's pleasant things may be taken away; sabbaths and solemn assemblies may be forgotten in Zion, and the ways of Zion mourn, Lam. i. 4. 7. The church complains, Psal. lxxiv. 9, "We see not our signs; there is no more any prophet." The church may flee into a wilderness of obscurity and persecution, her witnesses may be slain by a natural or civil death,* some time or other these prophecies have an accomplishment; Jeremiah and Ezekiel may both have their mouths stopped by their brethren, and God himself may be a little sanctuary to such as want the open sanctuary privileges, Ezek. xi. 15, 16. The gospel in its course may be stopped or obstructed, so that Paul puts believers on to pray for him, that the word of the Lord may have free course, 2 Thess. iii. 1; intimating that it had met with hindrance; by what? by men's rage, or the devil's subtlety, or both, 1 Thess. ii. 16, the Jews forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles, and verse 18, Satan hindered us. Sometimes the devil stirs up men to obstruct the course of the gospel. The history of the church in all ages will offer its service to bear witness to this truth, that liberty of ordinances is sometimes infringed, and so the ark is withdrawn into some sequestered place; for where God hath a people they must and will worship him, and attend his institutions; if they cannot do it openly, they act more privately, as Christ's disciples frequently met in houses, in the night, the doors being shut, and that for fear of the Jews, John xx. 19. And it may be that word Isa.

* Rev. xii. 14. xi. 7.

viii. 16, refers to such a day, "Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples."

2. The ark and ordinances may sometimes be in a state of obscurity, as well as obstructed; the institutions of religion may be tarnished or corrupted. This observation has a reference to the purity, as the former has to the liberty of God's appointments. The light may be dimmed, as well as diminished. Painted glass obscures the light: so human inventions corrupt God's pure worship. Jeroboam's golden calves spoiled the purity of ordinances; so that religious people, and priests fled to God's sincere worship at Jerusalem, 2 Chron. xi. 13, 16. This defilement of ordinances makes God's poor children cry out, "Death is in the pot." Our Saviour saith of the Scribes and Pharisees, "Thus have you made the commandments of God of none effect by your traditions, and therefore in vain did they worship God," Matt. xv. 6, 9. God's institutions are ours, but men may mar and spoil them with their fond additions or alterations. Ezek. vii. 20, "As for the beauty of his ornaments, he set it in Majesty, but they made the images of their abominations, and of their detestable things therein," though they called and accounted them delectable things, "therefore have I set it far from them." Men may be guilty of treasonable practices, by adulterating the king's coin,* or setting their own stamp thereon, or clipping it. There is a sad woe, both in the beginning, middle, and end of the Bible, against those that add to, or diminish from God's word or institutions.† It is a dangerous thing to think to mend what God hath thought good to enjoin. Anti-christ hath so corrupted God's worship, as well as truths, that they who love their souls or safety, are

* *Crimen læsæ majestatis.*

† Deut. iv. 2. Prov. xxx. 6. Rev. xxii. 13, 19.

called upon to come out of her, Rev. xviii. 4. God is a jealous God, and will not hold such guiltless as take his name in vain, that is, he will deal with them as guilty malefactors. Nay, God bids them rather go serve their idols, than pollute his holy name, Ezek. xx. 39. Some shepherds also are said to tread down with their feet the residue of the pastures, and foul the waters with their feet; so that God's flock is in danger of pining, Ezek. xxxiv. 18. God's children know how to avoid a sinful separation on one hand, and a communion that necessitates them to sin, on the other; there is danger in both extremes. Poor scrupulous, tender consciences are too apt to run into the former, and adventurous spirits are too apt to run into the latter, for by and base purposes; sometimes the latter happens as well as the former, when godly ministers and Christians must either sin, or suffer; and to a conscientious soul, the case is soon determined: and hence it comes to pass that their persons and ordinances with them, have been forced into a state of privacy and seclusion. The witnesses will rather choose to prophesy in sackcloth with purity,* according to God's will, than live in the greatest pomp and splendour, betraying the truths and appointments of God, by superstition or idolatry, to gratify flesh, or comply with the humours of men; they judge it safer to be banished from the altar, than bring strange fire to it; they think it safer to venture on men's displeasure, though the furnace be heated with seven-fold intenseness, than expose themselves to the dreadful vengeance of the great God, by sinning against him, and provoking the eyes of his glory. They resolve to cleave to the ark, though in Abinadab's house, and follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth,† rather than be dragged down to sin and hell

* Rev. xi. 3.

† Rev. xiv. 4.

with the dragon's tail :* though persecution attend the former, as in the Marian days, and preferment wait on the latter.

The second general thing to be explained in the text and doctrine, is, what is implied in this lamenting after the Lord? The word ינחו comes from נוח, *quiescere* : the same word with Noah, which signifies rest ; “ They rested after the Lord.” It is in Niphal, which increaseth its signification, and denotes these seven things :—

1. They inclined after the Lord. They had wandered away from the Lord, and never thought of him ; they had turned aside after vain things, but now they began to hearken to Samuel's preaching, and began to look about them, consider what they were doing, and had a month's mind, as we say, after God, and his ways and worship. A heart to inquire after the Lord, is a good thing : as it is said of the men of Shechem, their hearts inclined after Abimelech, or to follow him, Judg. ix. 3. It is well so : for when people stand still, and question themselves in this manner : what have we been doing? have we done well or ill? what course is best to be taken? and begin to have some inclinations after God more than formerly, this is the first step.

2. They had become settled, and established in reference to the Lord. They staggered formerly and were much in suspense, wavering like the apostle James's double-minded man,† not knowing which way to take, or like those referred to, 1 Kings xviii. 21 : Why halt ye between two opinions? one while leaning to Baal, another while to God, reeling like drunkards, halting like lame men whose legs are not equal, fluctuating to and fro with divers thoughts: but now this

* Rev xii. 4.

† James i. 18.

people is firm, well resolved, with purpose of heart determined to cleave to the Lord, Acts xi. 23. The trembling needle fixeth towards its centre; the tree has taken deep root; the will is bowed; the affections settled; the conscience clear; nothing shall obstruct their course; they have set down the staff, and say as Ruth to her mother-in-law, Ruth i. 16, 17, "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go," &c. So these: though they had been hesitating and doubtful what to do, yet their steps have become sure and firm in their motion God-wards.*

3. They were congregated and assembled after the Lord: so some read it. They now begin to flock like doves to their windows; they troop after him. † Jer. iii. 17, "All nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the Lord God;" yea, "Judah shall go with Israel," verse 18. See also Jer. l. 45. They had been broken, now they are united. Some went after commands and examples from one quarter, some after others from another; but now the great God makes an act of uniformity and unanimity, Zech. xiv. 9, "In that day there shall be one Lord, and his name one:" one sovereign commander, one way, one worship: that great God doth not only enjoin one thing, but doth join them in one bond and mind. O happy day! when the grace of God heals the breaches that are in men's spirits, and divisions in the church!

4. They groaned, complained, bemoaned themselves in their following the Lord, as a child followeth his departing father, and as Phaltiel followed his wife Michal, weeping behind her to Bahurim, 2 Sam. iii. 15, 16; or as Micah followed the Danites who took

* Jam in Dei obsequio gradum figunt stabilem et certum.

† Collecti sunt post Dominum.

away his idols, who, when he was crying after them, said, "What aileth thee?" to which he replied, "Ye have taken away my gods—and what have I more? and what is this that ye say unto me, What aileth thee?" Judg. xviii. 23, 24; as if he had said, you could not have done me a worse turn: lay your hands on your hearts, ask yourselves, whether any loss can parallel this, of losing one's God? You need not be inquisitive for a reason of my solicitude and complaint, when all good is comprehended in this chief good, whether real or imaginary. Thus, this people lamented, laid to heart this great evil of God's departure, which no temporal good can compensate or countervail.

5. They called, cried, and lifted up their voice after the Lord, by earnest prayer and supplication. The word sometimes imports sighing: "Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee," Psalm lxxix. 11. Sometimes it is rendered lifting up the voice, as Lam. ii. 18, not only their hearts cried unto the Lord, but tears ran down like a river day and night: verse 19, "Arise, cry out in the night, pour out thine heart like water, lift up thy hand towards him:" yea, Lam. iii. 8, she did both cry and shout, not that God is deaf, or busy, or pursuing enemies, or sleeping, and must be awaked, as Elijah ironically twits Baal's worshippers with their God,* but for our own sakes, to evidence the honesty and zeal of our hearts, and as a gracious disposition to which mercy is promised. Hence it was that when the children of Israel cried, their cry came up unto God, Exod. ii. 23. Crying is the accent of prayer: a crying prayer sounds loud in God's ear. The tender mother's bowels make her look back on her crying child. God loves to be called back by a fervent, affectionate prayer.

* 1 Kings xviii. 27

6. They betook themselves to the Lord, that is, by faith, by repentance, covenanting with God, returning from sin, and having recourse to God by a sincere reformation; without the last all the former were insignificant: but thus did the children of Israel, according to Samuel's command and supposition, in chap. vii. verse 3—If ye do return with all your heart to the Lord, then put away strange gods, and prepare your hearts for the Lord, and serve him only; and they did so, verse 4. This was their best way of lamenting after the Lord. No coming after God with a lie in our right hand, or idols in our hearts; if we do, God will spurn us back into confusion, for nothing keeps persons at a distance from him, but sin: they that hold fast sin and pretend to follow God, do either run from him, or follow him with a sword in their hand to wound him; but such as cast away their abominations follow the Lord aright, and shall succeed in approaching him. This is the method prescribed by God himself: Jer. iv. 1, 2, "If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the Lord, return unto me; and if thou wilt put away thine abominations out of thy sight, then shalt thou not remove, and thou shalt swear the Lord liveth." Then, and never till then, are souls fit to join in covenant with God, when they are divorced from all besides.

7. They were acquiescing in, and fully satisfied with the Lord: this is the proper notion of this word.* Their hearts had abundant tranquillity and peace in the manner of God's worship, and much more in the object of their worship, and in the union of their hearts to God, and communion with him: no satisfaction like this. David saith, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul," Psalm cxvi. 7: no such rest, as God is, who is

* *Chald.* Quieti fuerunt post cultum Domini.

the soul's only centre and sabbath. Jer. xxxi. 25, "I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul:" as God rests in his love to his saints, so they are well satisfied with their choice of God, and look not out other ways, or beyond him for any contentments to their spirits. Thus then these pious souls, these lamenting penitents might say: Alas, we have been like wandering sheep that have gone astray, every one wandering in his own way, or as a bird wandering from its nest, or as prodigals from our father's house; but now, now at length by Samuel's prophecy we are thoroughly informed that God is the true God, that this prescribed worship is of his institution, and the means of communion with him. At our first hearing this man of God, we were touched, and began to incline towards him; at last, we came to a fixed resolution to follow the Lord in this his way, we were assembled together for this purpose, bemoaned our state in the loss of so dear a friend, cried after him, put away our idols and lusts, returned to the Lord by faith and repentance, and now we see it is not in vain, it is good, yea, very good for us thus to draw near to God; we find full content in him; we find the enjoyment of him a full recompence for all our pains in a mournful pursuit of him. We have found him, at last we have found him, and happiness in him; he is come whom we sought, we need not look for another, we care not for any other. We fear nothing, since we have found our God.

From hence we may discern the reason why the same word in Hebrew* signifies both to repent and to comfort, to mourn and to cease mourning, to lament and rejoice; for as true comfort belongs only to peni-

* נחם, doluit, pœnituit. נחם, *per antiphrasin*, dedoluit, dolore desiit, consolationem invenit.

tent souls, so sorrow is the porch and inlet to joy; none are exalted, but they that are first cast down; none bring forth the blessed babe of joy, but such as travail in the pangs of sorrow, John xvi. 21. The painter can with a touch of his pencil turn a mournful into a smiling face: thus saith David, "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing; thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness."—Psalm xxx. 11.

Thirdly, Let us ascertain the reasons why it is so fit that God's Israel or professing people should thus lament after the Lord, when God's ark is in a state of obscurity or his ordinances obstructed. In confirmation of this point, I must demonstrate, that they must lament after the ark of the Lord; and especially after the Lord of the ark.

1. God's Israel or professing people, must lament after the ark, that is, the ordinances of the Lord, when in a state of obscurity, or obstructed.

(1.) Because the ark or ordinances of the Lord are a people's greatest glory, their beauty, strength, and honour. Wherein is Israel better than other nations, but by having ordinances of God among them; Psal. cxlvii. 19, 20, "He shewed his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel; he hath not dealt so with any nation;" as if he had said, this, this is that which exalts Israel above all other kingdoms, that they have the visible tokens of God's presence, which is a people's only glory; so saith the apostle, Rom. ix. 4, "To the Israelites pertain the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises." This is Israel's heritage, their patrimony, and a rich one it is: hence when the ark was taken, Phinehas's wife breathed her last, with that doleful lamentation, "The

glory is departed from Israel, for the ark of God is taken," 1 Sam. iv. 21.

(2.) Because the obscuring, tarnishing, and obstructing of ordinances is a heavy judgment, worse than all other plagues, both absolutely considered in itself, and comparatively, if it be compared with other judgments. God threatens to do by Jerusalem, as he did by Shiloh, Jer. vii. 14; how that was the context shews. And Ezek. xxiv. 21, "I will profane my sanctuary, the excellency of your strength." Many other threats speak God's hot displeasure in this case, and the evil is greater, because it reacheth to the soul, which is the best part of man. Hence Amos viii. 11, 12, "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will send a famine in the land," (which surely is a dreadful judgment, worse than the sword, Lam. iv. 9. But what famine?) "Not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord;" this, this is the sorest judgment; this judgment on the soul is the soul of judgments, when poor sinners are exposed inevitably to die and be tormented in hell without means or remedy. "Where no vision is the people perish," Prov. xxix. 18. Hos. iv. 6, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."

(3.) Because there is much advantage in the enjoyment of ordinances. Herein consists the kingdom of heaven; so the preaching of the gospel is frequently called; and this word is the word of the kingdom, and gospel of the kingdom, because it is an introduction or means to introduce persons into the kingdom of grace, and then of glory. That is a dreadful threatening, Matt. xxi. 43, "Therefore shall the kingdom of God be taken from you, and be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." If any ask me, as Rom. iii. 1, 2, "What advantage hath the Jew?" or the

professing Christian under the gospel dispensation? “or what profit is there of circumcision, or of spiritual privileges? I answer, “much every way, chiefly because that unto them have been committed the oracles of God, and so salvation is of the Jews;”* as our Lord saith: even so those that have gospel ordinances, have great helps for the conversion, edification, and salvation of their souls; for Christ hath set up his ensign among them for souls to flock unto.† These are wells of salvation, a feast of fat things, breasts of consolation, where souls may milk out, and be abundantly delighted; here are the keys of the kingdom, by means of which heaven gates stand open continually; the door of faith, the ministration of the Spirit, the day of salvation, &c.‡ And is not all this worth lamenting after the Lord to enjoy? if not, what is?

(4.) Because this is the character and disposition of a child of God, to lament after the ark and ordinances of God. “I have,” saith David, “loved the habitation of thy house,” Psal. xxvi. 8. Therefore he makes this his *unum magnum* one thing, which he desires of the Lord, “to dwell in the house of the Lord,” Psal. xxvii. 4. Two things excite a Christian spirit to lament after God for the ark:—

First, He hath a gracious principle, an enlightened eye to see what others cannot discern; the Christian calls such a place Beer-la-hai-roi, as Hagar did, Gen. xvi. 14, “The well of him that liveth and seeth me.” So the Christian sees God’s way in the sanctuary; there he beholds the beauty of the Lord. || The Psalmist saith, “They have seen thy goings, O God,

* Rom. iii. 2. John iv. 22.

† Isa. xi. 10.

‡ Isa. xii. 3. xxv. 6. lxvi. 11. Matt. xvi. 19. Isa. lx. 13. Acts xiv. 27. 2 Cor. iii. 8. vi. 2.

|| Psal. lxxvii. 13. xxvii. 4.

even the goings of my God, my King, in the sanctuary."* Yea, the devout soul hath an appetite and taste suitable to what he meets with in the ordinances of God, faith, love, desire, and joy; as new born children have a natural instinct directing them to their mother's milk for conservation of life; so 1 Peter ii. 2, the saints "as new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby." The law of God engraven in their hearts, corresponds with the word they hear explained by ministers: Christ within them, (by his Spirit and graces) as the hope of glory, prompts them to a love to Christ, and a longing after him in the holy supper, and all his other institutions.

Secondly, Add to this, the frequent experiences the believing soul hath had of the sweetness of divine grace in ordinances, which cannot but excite in him strong desires after similar enjoyments; Psal. lxiii. 1, 2, "My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is, to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary." So Song ii. 3, 4, "I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste; yea, he brought me into his banqueting-house, and his banner over me was love." No wonder if she was so distressed when she wanted him.

This leads me to observe,

2. That Christians should lament after the God of ordinances, or God in ordinances; so saith the text, "The house of Israel lamented after the Lord." Why?

(1.) Because God is infinitely more worth than all ordinances; his presence is prizable for itself. The ark is but to be esteemed for his gracious presence; "In his favour is life," Psal. xxx. 5. "His loving-kindness is better than life," Psal. lxiii. 3. This is the

* Psal. lxviii. 24.

marrow of heaven, the want of this is hell. "Woe also be to them when I depart from them," Hos. ix. 12: and this the child of God knows.

(2.) God purposely withdraws that men may lament after him; as when a mother steps out of a child's sight, and when she seems to be gone, the child raises a cry after her; Hos. v. 15, "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face; in their affliction they will seek me early."

(3.) Because sincere lamenting after the Lord may occasion his return; he purposely hovers, waits and expects, that his people may call him back by their prayers, entreaties, humiliation; not as though God were moved, or changed by men's mournful complaints and outcries, but that such an earnest lamenting qualifies the subject, capacitates for mercy, and puts souls into the condition of the promise. Jer. xxix. 12, 13, "Then shall ye call upon me, and shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you, and ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart."

(4.) God blesseth his people usually in and by ordinances, with his best blessings, Psal. cxxxiii. 3, "There the Lord commands the blessing, even life for ever more." Eph. i. 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places*,* *things*, or *means* in Christ." It would be needless to reckon up all the blessings our dear Lord conveys to his people by ordinances, and for which it becomes us to lament after the Lord, in his appointments; (for now I join them together.)

[i.] Sometimes God gives outward blessings with his ark. So the Lord blessed the house of Obed-edom,

* 'Εν τοῖς ἰπουρανίοις.

and all that pertained to him because of the ark of God, 2 Sam. vi. 12. The gospel of peace oft brings outward peace and plenty, though through the corruption of men's hearts it stirs up opposition occasionally.

[ii.] But the chief blessings are spiritual, as conversion of the soul to God, regeneration, effectual vocation; so that it may oft be said, as of Zion, This and that man was born there, Psal. lxxxvii. 5. Also increase of grace: 2 Cor. iii. 18, "We all with open face, beholding as in a glass," this broader glass of ordinances, and the secret glass of private duties, "the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory," that is, from grace to grace, "as by the Spirit of the Lord," or of the Lord the Spirit.* Besides, ordinances discover, and help to remove those foul spots that are on the face of the Christian, James i. 23, 24. Sanctuary discoveries resolve many intricate cases in the providence of God; see Psal. lxxiii. 17. Here also the hearts of God's people may be abundantly satisfied, Psal. xxxvi. 8; for here is goodness from God to do it, Psal. lxxv. 4. Ordinances are channels,† through which divine grace and influences flow to the soul, Zech. iv. 12. These display Christ, open gospel privileges, promises, terms of salvation, are as the gate of heaven; well then may, and must the observant believing soul, lament after both the ordinances of God, and God in his ordinances.

Fourthly, An objection may be framed against all that I have said. You will say, What is all this canting for? how doth it concern us? have we not public ordinances? doth not the gospel flourish? is there not excellent preaching in public places? The generality have no reason to complain, since we have christian magistrates, a glorious church, learned preachers; nay,

* Ἀπὸ Κυρίου Πνεύματος

† Canales gratiæ.

with respect to others that pretend tenderness of conscience, they complain before they are hurt; have they not their separate meetings in a public way without disturbance? Little reason have any to make this ado in lamenting; what cause have you to lament?

I answer as Cleophas, "Art thou only a stranger in our Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come pass there in these days?"* If you ask what things? Do I need to inform you, or rub up your memories by telling you, that twenty years ago two thousand ministers, then found in peaceable possession of their places of worship, were dispossessed and ejected by the Act of Uniformity, commencing August 24, 1662, and shortly after in 1665, were prohibited meeting together above four for religious worship, and another Act prohibiting them from coming or being within five miles of any such place where they had preached, or a corporation, and were severely menaced and punished by a second Act, against conventicles, with sharper penalties; and though the king's majesty set them at liberty for a season, yet that was quickly retracted, and many could have little benefit by it. Now, whether the silencing of ministers be not an obstructing of the gospel, and of ordinances, judge you; and if you say you are not concerned in this case, I shall not speak to you, but turn my discourse to others: only I shall briefly propose some questions. First, about the ordinances of God; and secondly, about the God of ordinances, and leave it to you to judge whether there be not some cause to lament after the Lord.

1. Are all congregations supplied with able, faithful ministers? God forbid I should condemn all, or censure any unjustly; blessed be God there are some gracious men in public stations, whose main design is

* Luke xxiv. 18, 19.

to win souls to God ; but O how small is their number ! I would rather you read an account of this in *Ichabod*, or Five Groans of the Church, writ by a conforming minister A. D. 1663 ; in which he laments 3000 raw young heads, that teach before they have learned, and 1500 debauched ministers, in which also many factious men, some illiterate tradesmen, simonists, pluralists, and non-residents are particularly described. God knows whether these things be true ; but it is well if many have not cause to complain as our Lord, Matt. ix. 36, who when he saw the multitudes, was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd ; you know what follows : if all public places were well supplied there would be less need of us ; if there were no need, we should be glad of a *supersedeas*.

2. Is there not work enough for all the ministers in England, if all were faithful, conscientious, and set themselves seriously to the work of God ? Oh how many thousand ignorant souls to be instructed ! obstinate, to be admonished ; careless, to be quickened ; weak, to be strengthened ; wandering, to be reclaimed !* Surely they that know any thing of the worth of souls, of the work of the ministry, and of the importance of eternity, cannot but bitterly lament that so little is done for saving of sinners, and that there are so few to lay out themselves, or that do actually or effectually perform the work of faithful pastors, for the conviction and edification of sinners' souls. If every minister in England were gracious, and had a hundred persons under his cure and charge, he would find it as difficult to manage, as a physician dealing with so many patients under several diseases. *Hic labor, hoc opus.*

3. Does not the liberty that some take in dispens-

* See Ezek. xxxiv. 4.

ing ordinances labour under many disadvantages? Are they not subject to fines, confiscations, imprisonments, banishments, and censures? and all have not an equal opportunity of feeding Christ's flock, where there is the same necessity. What liberty is taken, is but stolen, or from courtesy; still they are exposed to the rage of malevolent spirits, and under the lash of the law, and also under the censure of being indiscreet zealots, that adventure further than their more prudent brethren; yet still the candle is under a bushel, and they that need it the most, have least share in it, they are glad that they are out of the way, and are furnished with stones enow, even by existing laws, to cast at such as would disturb them in their career of sin, and while posting down to hell; and in these circumstances, those whose eyes are opened to see the blind running into a pit, cannot but lament that their hands are so bound that they cannot stop them.

4. Are there not sad symptoms upon us of a departing gospel? It would not now be seasonable to enumerate the prognostics of God's taking away his ark and ordinances. Mr. Gurnal,* speaking of the unkind welcome the gospel hath found among us, addeth, "O what will God do with this degenerate age in which we live! O England, England! I fear some sad judgment or other bodes thee! If such glad tidings as the gospel brings be rejected, sad news cannot be far off. I cannot think of less than a departing gospel. God never made such a settlement of his gospel amongst any people, but he could remove it from them. He comes but upon liking, and will he stay where he is not welcome? who will that hath elsewhere to go?" Read the rest. Two words on this; observe,

(1.) Have there not been many great attempts made

* Christian in Complete Armour, part 2, p. 325.

to quench the light amongst us? O what a combination is there at home and abroad, of Papists and atheists, to root out the name of Israel, and to banish the God of Israel, and cause him to cease from amongst us!*

O what crafty councils, and potent confederates, animated with devilish hatred, may we espy in this our native country! Antichrist makes many furious assaults, with a design to kill the poor witnesses, after they have been prophesying in sackcloth, Rev. xi. 3, 7. Even among ourselves, are there not some that are indifferent whether the ark or mass, gospel preaching or dumb idols take place? Yea, some say unto God, Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.† Men are scorched with the glorious rays of the gospel sun, and blaspheme God, rather than kindly melted by its warm and benign influences.‡ How many Ahabs hate Micaiahs? or Felixes at best, that adjourn the court of conscience, and plain preaching? or Gadarenes, that prefer their swine-sty to God's sanctuary, and desire the blessed Jesus to depart out of our coasts? God's ark is a troublesome guest to graceless Philistines. Some that received not the truth in love, || are in danger of being given up to Popish delusions, and of joining the mixed multitude that fall a lusting or longing for the onions of Egypt. If the gospel may be sinned away, surely it is in hazard now to depart. If monstrous lusts, defiances of heaven, unfruitfulness, decay of zeal, loss of first love, carnal confidence in privileges, and contempt of the power of godliness, neutrality and empty formality, have ever robbed any people of this pearl; surely, without an extraordinary display of mercy, we cannot keep it long.

(2.) Where are the souls that stir up themselves to

* Psalm lxxxiii 3—3. Isa. xxx. 10, 11. † Job xxi. 14.

‡ Rev. xvi. 9.

|| 2 Thess. ii. 10.

take hold of a withdrawing God? * Some I hope there are that stand in the gap, but oh how few, and how faintly! Where is there a Moses to hold up his hands, a Joshua to fall at God's feet, a Phinehas to execute justice? God sees that there is no man, and may wonder that there is no intercessor. † Strange that there should be none to guide our Zion among all the sons she hath brought forth! What! none to take her by the hand, of all the sons she hath brought up! ‡ What! is there no nail strong enough for bearing such a weight? Well, this is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation.

But may not the innocent deliver the island? may not the poor wise man deliver the city? are not saints' prayers effectual? Yes. But where are they? The old stock is worn out, and few new ones come in for a supply. Strong torrents are carried through the dead sea into the ocean of eternity; and new springs are yet rare and faint. Where shall we find Elijah's spirit doubled on a succeeding Elisha? Though a kingdom may have much treasure in it, yet if trade cease, and no bullion or merchandise be imported, it will decay, because it lives upon the old stock. This is our case: aged saints are worn away, few converts fit to plead with God come in their room. And this is the devil's design, to wear out the saints of the Most High, and extirpate the genuine seed of Jacob. But alas! "by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small." His face waxeth pale, having of late lost so much good blood. And doth not our Lord sometimes withdraw the Spirit of prayer, which is virtually saying, "Pray not for this people?" Do not stupidity and sleepiness seize on the disciples, even when Jesus is in his agony? Doth not this bode evil? Are there not in them, even in them,

* Isa. lxiv. 7.

† Isa. lix. 16.

‡ Isa. li. 18.

sins enow to weaken and make void their own prayers? Alas! what divisions, what decays, deadness, unprofitableness? The old Puritan spirit is gone; we are wofully degenerated: professors are grown like the world: how unlike are we to primitive saints? "Abraham is ignorant of us, Israel would not acknowledge us for their genuine seed." But may we not think our disease is grown so stubborn and inveterate, that no doses will conquer the disease, though the hard strugglings of nature may maintain life for a season? Judgments have been prorogued, upon the vine-dresser's interposing importunity, three years longer, but beware of the fourth: God's patience hath bounds; his Spirit will not always strive. We look like a people ripe for ruin: however, Noah, Daniel, and Job may deliver their own souls (though none besides) by their righteousness.* God can make those few names in Sardis to walk in white, though he come against her as a thief, and leave her in Egyptian darkness:† he can find harbour for his children, though he pull down the house upon the heads of formal hypocrites: and if there be not cause of lamenting after the ark when its removal is feared, to be sure men will see cause to lament when this evil is felt. "The anger of the Lord shall not return, until he hath executed, till he hath performed the thoughts of his heart; in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly."—Jer. xxiii. 20.

Secondly, Is not the God of ordinances much removed from amongst us? and is not he worth lamenting after? God makes gradual removes. It is true, sometimes the sun sets at noon day;‡ yet ordinarily the sun leaves the horizon by sensible declinings. The glory of the Lord goes out from the cherub, to the

* Ezek. xiv. 14.

† Rev. iii. 3, 4.

‡ Amos viii. 9.

threshold of the house, thence to the middle of the city, thence to the mountain.*

I shall briefly mention four removes which our Lord hath taken from us, under the form of questions?

1. Is not restraining grace much gone from amongst us? Some persons in former times were wont to be civil, orderly, and in many things conformable to the letter of the word; but now God hath cast the reins on their necks, and they get the bits of conscience betwixt the teeth of sensual affections, and obstinate sinning, and there is no restraining them; they run mad in their own ways; petty oaths by mass or troth, are converted into broad curses, and full-mouthed blasphemies; tippling into down-drive drunkenness, and open reeling; wanton dalliances into defended adulteries; squibbing at strictness, into open persecution of all that looks like seriousness; from questioning divine Providence, men advance to avowed atheism, and open defiance of heaven. Some men are given up to such sins as are not fit to be named, and which themselves formerly would have blushed to mention; and if any had predicted their committing them, they would have said as Hazael, "Is thy servant a dog?"† Sinners that used to walk under a vail or mask, now go bare-faced, and men glory in their shame.‡ Many abhor sobriety, justice, and temperance. We overpass the deeds of the wicked; the moral heathens would be ashamed of us. Men work all uncleanness with greediness: yea, if they court God in a few formal prayers, they think they are delivered to do all these abominations; as though they had got a Popish indulgence and dispensation to sin: as Breerwood in his inquiries tells us, the common people think they do the priest a kindness to find him work by new sinning to get pardons. Yea,

* Ezek. ix. 3. xi. 23. † 2 Kings viii. 13. ‡ Phil. iii. 19.

some think it strange of others, that they are not as bad as themselves :* and is not this matter of lamentation, to see the earth thus forsaken by a righteous God, and possessed by so many bears, lions, tigers, and goats ? † that men are grown wolves, yea devils to each other ! Is it not time to lament after that God, that gives up men to such profligate and shocking courses as hasten their own damnation, and England's desolation ? Is it not time to seek God till he come and rain righteousness upon us ? Hos. x. 12.

2. Is not converting grace much withdrawn from the ordinances of God ? and doth not this call sensible souls to lament after the Lord ? Time hath been that our Lord hath mounted his white horse, and hath bent his bow, and shot his arrows of conviction, and made them sharp in the hearts of the king's enemies, and caused people to fall under him, going forth conquering, having had his crown set upon his head by the daughters of Jerusalem. ‡ But alas ! now the church hath a miscarrying womb, and dry breasts : ministers cry out, " Who hath believed our report ? " I have laboured in vain. || God doth not go forth with his word as formerly. The apostles were fishers, and enclosed many at a draught ; present ministers are hunters, they shout and run all day, and catch but one or two, and well too. It is worth a whole life's pains. Though it cannot be denied, God's despised servants have now and then seals of their ministry to God's glory, their encouragement, and the stopping of the mouths of slanderers. Jerusalem is built even in troublesome times : the gospel is not bound, though ministers be. Men civilly dead, may convey spiritual life. God hath

* 1 Pet. iv. 4.

† Terras Astræa reliquit.

‡ Rev. vi. 2. Psalm xlv. 5. Song iii. 11.

|| Isa. liii. 1. xlix. 4.

not left his servants without some testimonies in the consciences and conversations of their hearers, that he is in his ordinances of a truth. But alas! how few gleanings hath our dear Lord, compared with the full vintage Satan gets among men? We take these first fruits thankfully, till the full harvest come. Let ministers and people lament after the Lord, that he would fill his house with glory, hasten the day of his power, to make people cheerful volunteers in the Lord's warfare. Oh that more might knock at our doors with—"What must I do to be saved? Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" Lord, clothe thine ordinances with thy power. When shall Aaron's rod bring forth ripe almonds? Lord, let the children of the covenant own the God of their fathers, and be indulged with covenant grace. Lord, let thy love to a world of sinners be manifested in converting grace, as well as in the gift of thy Son: let sermons be seconded with power: make thy word the arm of God unto salvation.

3. Doth not God much withdraw from the societies of his servants? Are there to be found that sincere attachment and faithfulness amongst God's people to each other as in former days? Is there not much pride, worldliness, decay of love to God, and want of such spiritual zeal for God, as was in the days of old? Alas! we have reason to think that the Spirit of prayer is much withdrawn; and also that close walking, that distance from appearances of sin, that devotedness to God, that endearedness and usefulness of Christians amongst themselves which formerly prevailed. Yea, hath not God seemed to take peace from the earth? Is not Manasseh against Ephraim, and Ephraim against Manasseh, and they together against Judah? * Papists against Protestants, and Protestants

* Isa. ix. 21.

against Papists, and they together against zealous worshippers, and exact walkers according to pure and primitive institutions? Are not some members of the same church, that desire to keep close to the rule, rendered black, while the sun hath looked upon them with some malignant aspects and reflections of displeasure? even the same mother's children are angry with them.* Their own watchmen pity them not: nay, some watchmen are so rigid and censorious, that they find them out, wound them, take away their vail from them,† expose the members of their own church, as if they were factious, traitorous, or heretical, and will hold no communion with them, though they have much charity for them, and pursue them with entreaties to beg their consent to walk with them towards heaven, and join in God's work for winning souls: but alas, they browbeat them, and seem to deny them liberty to worship the same God, own the same Bible, or have an interest in the same common Saviour: if this be not for a lamentation, what is? Methinks some deal with their brethren, as Saul's courtiers with honest David, 1 Sam. xxvi. 19, "They have driven me out this day from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord, saying, Go, serve other gods: or, as it is, Ezek. xi. 15, "Son of man, thy brethren, even thy brethren, the men of thy kindred, and all the house of Israel wholly, are they unto whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, Get ye far from the Lord, unto us is this land given in possession." Monopolies are dangerous in spiritual things. What envy hath excluding others occasioned in these cases? Lamentable is the account given in the English history, of the haughty carriage of Austin the monk, and petulant behaviour of the British bishops,‡ who, because of private animosities,

* Song i. 6. † Song v. 7. ‡ Mr. Clark's Martyrol. part 1, p. 13.

neglected to join with the other in preaching the gospel to the idolatrous Saxons. Austin predicted and menaced, that if they would not have peace with their brethren, they should have war with their enemies. Shortly after Ethelbert king of Northumberland, being a Pagan, went with a great army against the city of Chester, overcame the Britons, and slew eleven hundred monks, that is, persons religiously devoted to God, for praying on behalf of the Britons, only fifty having escaped with Brockmail mayor of Chester. A spirit of jealousy in so good a work, hath always bad effects; and pride hath dreadful consequences. Church divisions are much to be lamented, and very rarely issue without civil dissensions. For the divisions of Reuben there ought to be sad searchings, and heavy thoughts of heart.* Lord, when shall conscience-racking oaths be abolished? How long shall entangling orders for decency rend the vitals of thy church? When shall subscription to Christ's laws suffice?

It is sure a matter of lamentation that the devil casts the bone of contention among professing Christians, and they snarl at each other about it. How long shall the pride and wrath of men make and blow up that spark into a flame, which Satan the great makebate casts among them? When will men see the hand of Joab in all this? and discern at last that among all these contending clients, none is gainer but that common barrister? Lord, open men's eyes, heal our bleeding wounds, and bring back that ancient christian love, and peace, charity, and humility.

4. Once more; is there no cause for God's children to lament after the Lord for his return to their spirits? Is not God much withdrawn from the hearts of his people? If a child of God say as Samson, "I will go

* Judg. v. 15, 16.

out as at other times before, and shake myself; but he wisteth not that the Lord is departed from him.”* When he reflects on himself and finds it so, will he not see sad cause to lament? And have not some godly souls cause to say as Gideon, Judges vi. 13, “O my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?” And where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of? But now the Lord hath forsaken us,

(1.) In point of quickening, exciting, and actuating their graces. May not that sad complaint be taken up, Isa. lxiv. 7, “There is none that calleth on thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee; for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed† us because of our iniquities?” Where is that flaming love, that active faith, that gospel repentance, that lively hope, that filial fear, that spirit of adoption, that sound mind, that tender conscience, and those operative affections which existed in former days? It is much to be feared there is a general decay of grace, or damp in point of exercise on the spirits of living Christians: it will be well if the bridegroom find not even the wise virgins asleep.

(2.) As to strength and assistance, against the assaults of temptation, and out-breakings of corruption. Many thorns in the flesh, messengers of Satan,‡ do forcibly push forwards God’s children to sin, and they find not his grace sufficient for them, as at other times, but stumble, and fall, and are broken, snared and taken; even sometimes to the breaking of their bones, dishonouring of God, scandal of their profession, and endangering of their precious souls: “O let not such things be told in Gath, or published in Askelon, lest the uncircumcised Philistines triumph over God’s peo-

* Judg. xvi. 20

† *Heb.* melted.

‡ 2 Cor. xii. 7, 8.

ple, and be hardened in their sinful ways." Alas, where shall God's tender-spirited children hide their faces, when their brethren profane God's holy name, and men shall say, "These are the people of the Lord, and are gone forth out of his land," Ezek. xxxvi. 26. These are your precisians, and scrupulous zealots, that will not do as others; now they shew that they are a pack of hypocrites. This cuts deep, and wounds to the heart.

(3.) As to communion with God. God's people of old could assert it with an expressive confidence, *truly*, said they, however carnal men scorn it now, 1 John i. 3, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ;" not only in that secret, essential, fundamental communion, whereby grace is maintained in its being and life, but that sweet, sensible, soul-refreshing fellowship, that gives grace its activity, and maintains intercourse betwixt God and the soul in duty. But alas! have not God's children cause to complain as the church, that God withdraws himself; she seeks him but finds him not,* in public ordinances, in secret duties, or in communion of saints. God's children complain with Job, chap. xxiii. 8, 9, "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive him," &c. He looks east, west, north, and south, but in vain; this is strange, that God who is every where should be found no where—but though the child of God be aware of God's general omnipresence, and experience his common providence, yet he is not satisfied without his presence, and gracious influence; and missing this, he hath reason to lament after the Lord when he hides himself.

(4.) As to assurance, settlement, and comfort. Sometimes God's children are left to a sad unsatisfied and

* Song iii. 1. v. 6.

doubting frame, they are full of fears, troubles, and jealousies, and are much in the dark in point of state; this is a very general complaint at this day. Many have blurred their evidences by sins, or carelessness, and cannot give any distinct account how their principles are established, or what condition their souls are in; they are damped and daunted as to their interest in Christ, title to the promises, and hopes of heaven. Have not these great cause to lament after the Lord? and surely they must say as David, Psal. li. 8—12, "Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice; restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit." O my God! my soul is cast down within me;* one while I argue with my own heart, communing, expostulating, challenging, charging my spirit, and alas, I can do no good with it; at other times, I turn myself to God, but still I am restless, I cannot be quiet, but am tossed with tempests, and not comforted.† Well, I am determined to look towards God's holy temple, and cast myself at God's feet in virtue of that promise, Hosea vi. 3, "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord; his going forth is prepared as the morning, and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.

Thus much for the doctrinal part, and the removal of an objection.

All the application I shall make of this subject, shall only be in the form of exhortation, that we may be induced to engage in this seasonable and needful duty of lamenting after the Lord, the ark of the Lord, and the Lord of the ark. For this purpose I shall,

First, Propose some motives and arguments to enforce this duty.

* Psal. xlii. 6.

† Jonah ii. 3.

Secondly, Ascertain what description of persons are concerned thus to lament after the Lord.

Thirdly, Lay before you some helps or directions to carry on this work of serious lamentation.

Fourthly, Offer some cordials to encourage our hearts till the Lord return to us.

CHAP. III.

MOTIVES AND REASONS WHICH MAY CAUSE LAMENTATION AFTER THE LORD.

I. It is indeed a very sad consideration that this people of Israel were twenty years before they began to feel their situation, or come to themselves; and therefore in the enumeration of motives to the discharge of duty, I may observe,

1. That a professing people may lie long under dreadful spiritual judgments, without a sensible perception of them: it was so with the people here; it is well if it be not so with us. And this senseless frame is a greater evil than any other judgment.

But you may ask, how comes it to pass that men may be so long senseless, and not lament after the Lord all this while?

Ans. (1.) From the nature of sin. Sin is of a hardening, stupifying, brutifying nature; when men fall into sin, their hearts are hardened by it, Heb. iii. 13. Sin is of a cold congealing nature, it freezeth the soul, rocketh conscience asleep; and like the fish torpedo, that diffuseth its benumbing poison through the hand and arm, and creeping at last to the heart, kills a man; so doth sin. It is not to tell how David's

sin rocked him asleep, and led him on to other sins, till it endangered his soul's sleeping the sleep of death.

(2.) From the worldly enjoyments men have in room of ordinances. As the captives in Babylon being well settled amidst conveniencies and accommodations, forget God's appointments, and Jerusalem comes not into their minds, while their enjoyments afford contentment. And though some returned, they can sleep quietly in their ceiled houses, while the house of God lies waste, Hag. i. 4. God's ark is forgotten when men's private coffers are full. Personal comforts thrust out spiritual, as the sun's beams eat out the kitchen fire.

(3.) From the want of quickening means in the absence of ordinances. When the prophets are dead naturally or civilly, their monitors to duty are taken away, Psal. lxxiv. 9. "We see not our signs; there is no more any prophet, neither is there any among us that knoweth how long." When men want a Haggai or Zechariah, they lie still asleep, for want of awakening excitements. It is Samuel that promotes this lamenting after the Lord.

(4.) From the withdrawals of God's grace, Ps. lxxx. 18, "Quicken us, and we will call on thy name." As long as God turns his back on us, we shall be so far from kindly lamenting after him, that we shall turn and go back from him. "My soul followeth hard after thee," Psal. lxxiii. 8. How comes that to pass? why, "Thy right hand upholdeth me." It is God that gives a repenting heart, a lamenting soul. Oh, what are we if God leave us to ourselves! Let us study these causes of senselessness, and let our souls be ashamed. Tremble at these causes and their effects; bewail sin; settle not in worldly enjoyments; beg quickening means, and above all, divine grace for our assistance in lamenting after the Lord.

2. That God's professing people may and must stir up themselves to lament after the Lord. All men have rational faculties, gracious souls have spiritual principles, sloth kills both: self-excitation is possible, and a furtherance to this lamentation after God. Men as men have consciences, and conscience is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly,* by self-reflection, discovering the want of God and goodness, checking for evil, putting on to what is good; if you follow it not as far as it leads you, you wrong it, rebel against its master, and deprive yourselves of further assistance; contradict this preacher in thy bosom at thy peril. Means intervene betwixt a man's can, and his cannot; if thou canst not move a spiritual step, thou must move a natural step after the Lord; if thou canst not create a new heart, yet thou canst and must endeavour to have a new heart and a new spirit, Ezek. xviii. 31. If thou be not able to do God's work, thou must be doing thy own work: bemoan thyself, tell him what an unruly bullock thou art, and desire him to turn thee, and then thou shalt be turned; stir up thyself to take hold on God; stir up the gift of God in thee.† Charge thyself as David, "My soul, wait thou only upon God." Psal. lxii. 5. "Awake thou that sleepest, arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light," Eph. v. 14. "Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion! put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem! shake thyself from the dust; loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion!" Isa. lli. 1, 2. Now at last God expects you should labour to work your hearts to a discovery of your misery, the necessity you have of God, of his presence and ordinances. You may rouse yourselves to this work, you

* Prov. xx. 27. † Jer. xxxi. 18. Isa. lxiv. 7. 2 Tim. i. 6.

must, and if you do, God will help; if not, your destruction will be of yourselves.

3. This lamenting after the Lord and his ark hath been the practice, and is the true character of God's children. Eli's heart trembled for the ark of God. Phinehas's wife thought it not worth while to live when the ark was gone, 1 Sam. iv. 13, 21. The language of the prophet Isaiah is, "I will wait on the Lord that hideth his face, from the house of Jacob, and will look for him," Isa. viii. 17. This was when it was said, "bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples," *v.* 16. If you would seek and find God, seek not to familiar spirits, "but to the law, and to the testimony, *v.* 19, 20. For, should not a people seek unto their God? Sirs, shew what you are, and act as you seem. If you be God's children, run weeping after your father; cry after him, and say, "be not a terror to me," Jer. xvii. 17. Yea, why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night? Lord, art not thou in the midst of us? We are called by thy name, leave us not, Jer. xiv. 8, 9. "Be not thou far from me, O Lord, for trouble is near, for there is none to help," Psal. xxii. 11, 19. Oh! where is that ancient serious spirit of lamenting after the Lord? Where are those genuine workings of a child-like disposition after such a father? What is become of that sighing frame of heart, that spirit of adoption, with which God's children of old were endued? It will be well if new notions do not drive out that old spirit of lamentation. Shew that you are saints by this, as those few declared themselves Saul's faithful soldiers whose hearts God had touched, following him trembling, or trembling after him, 1 Sam. x. 26. and xiii. 7. So Hos. xi. *v.* 10. "They shall

walk after the Lord; he shall roar like a lion, when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west." Observe it, God's roaring in terrible threatenings or executions, drives not God's children from him, but to him, only they come trembling, appealing from God to God, from an avenging justice offended, to tender mercies through the merits of Jesus. Learn this mystery and christian privilege.

4. This is no controverted point, but an acknowledged duty on all hands, to which I am persuading; who dare contradict it? Yea, who dare dispute it? What exceptions can any bring against this, of lamenting after the Lord? I challenge any caviller to produce any show of reason against either branch of it; either as to the ordinances of God, or God in his ordinances. I think all parties are agreed in the theory. O that all were also agreed in the practice of this duty! whatever disputes men make about other rules or canons of practice, methinks there should be none about this. "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded, and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you; nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing," Phil. iii. 15, 16. Whence I discern,

(1.) That it is a vain, preposterous thing for persons to spend time in disputing about abstruse and obscure points, while they neglect momentous and evident duties.

(2.) The only way to have unity in less material truths or duties, is a conscientious practice of what is necessary and indubitable. I may truly say, that nothing is more likely to make us cordial friends, than the practice of the duty in my text; when Judah and Israel fall a weeping and seeking the Lord then

they go together. How amicable doth converting grace make those that were at deadly and desperate strife? for repentance turns the hearts of parents and children to each other.* Alas! till our faces be set towards the Lord, we shall rush with fury one against another: but if we agree in our devotedness to God, we shall agree amongst ourselves: lamenting together would clear our eyesight, and create a harmony of hearts.

5. Other persons in all other cases do lament after the objects that their hearts are set upon. David followed his deceased friend Abner with sorrow, and bitterly lamented the death of his son Absalom. The companions of Jephthah's daughter yearly lamented her. David much lamented Saul, (though his enemy while living,) and his sworn brother Jonathan. Jeremiah lamented for Josiah, and all the singing men and singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations: yea, they made them an ordinance in Israel, 2 Chron. xxxv. 25. And which of you are so hard-hearted, but you would lament a dead friend or brother, sister, wife, child, or parent? And canst thou not find in thy heart to spend some mournful thoughts on thy departing Lord, or follow the sad hearse of deceased ordinances? Ah carnal hearts! Ah hard hearts! Woe to insensible sinners! Shall a poor idolatrous Micah cry out after his teraphim? And shall we let the only true God go with silence and dry eyes? Is not our God worth lamenting after? Will even careless women lament at last for the teats, for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine? Isa. xxxii. 12, and shall not God's children lament for the full breasts of gospel ordinances? Shall not children cry and long for the sincere milk of the word that they may grow thereby? 1 Pet. ii. 2. If you were sensible, you would cry out, my father, a little

* Jer. l. 4, 5. Mal. iv. 6.

bread for an hungry soul, my mother, admit me to the breasts of consolation; I am pining, languishing, famishing to death, let me be nourished to eternal life.

6 If we lament not after the Lord and his ark, he will go yet further from us, if not totally leave us. There were never such symptoms of God's taking away the candlestick, and leaving us to the idolatry, and cruelties of popery in this kingdom, since the Reformation, as there are at this day: horrible abominations and atheism preparing for it, our ingratitude for prevention thus long, the general antipathy to a sound ministry, a spirit of giddiness disposed to entertain the most senseless fopperies, a mincing of some grosser Popish doctrines by pretended Protestants, human inventions coined in the darkest times of popery retained, also courts, fees, officers, and ceremonies; popish names, places, and customs defended; want of sympathy with our suffering brethren abroad; attempts for reformation not succeeding, but opposed; instruments reserved prepared for scourges; denying plots as clear as the sun; preferring Popish tyranny before Christ's government; most debauchery in some that should be best; popish emissaries swarming; popish families increasing; honest ministers much laying aside weapons and antidotes; fearlessness in many, and unpreparedness of all for such a dispensation; impressions on many of changes; liberty of attending on ordinances to lay in for a storm; unprincipled professors must pass an ordeal-trial; judgment beginning at God's house; choice saplings taken out of the hedge, transplanted to heaven; witnesses prophesying in sackcloth must be slain, the whore must sit as a queen, and see no loss of children; Antichrist must render himself more cruel and odious, to stir up king's hearts against the church; indifference of great potentates in the cause of religion; policy

for outward security, the compass that most steer by ; Christ's interest low in Protestant countries ; God's laying them under severe rebuke by his immediate hand : little notice taken of providences, no public fastings and humiliations, former guilt of blood unwiped off. Such things as these forbode a black diffusion of Popish darkness, and barbarous showers of blood ; God Almighty prevent : but certainly these things call for bitter lamenting after the Lord, either to prevent them or prepare our hearts for them, or both. I shall add,

7. There is no way to bring our Lord or his ark back to us, but this course of lamenting after him. God hath withdrawn himself purposely to make us follow him mourning ; and he seems to stand still and catch what we have to say in this case, Jer. viii. 6. "I hearkened and heard," saith God, "but they spake not aright." What was that ? certainly repenting of their sins, and lamenting inquiries after God ; and Jer. xxxi. 18, 19, if God can but hear persons bemoan themselves, follow him, desire the Lord to turn them, and turn to them, see what kind language he gives them, verse 20. "Is Ephraim my dear son ? is he a pleasant child ? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still ; therefore my bowels are troubled for him, I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." God doth act in this case as a loving father, who being provoked to scourge or leave his offending child, looks back on his sobbing, broken-hearted lamenting child, saying, Alas, my child, what ails thee ! what's the matter with thee ? What wantest thou ? Dost thou want a heart to repent, or a smile of favour ? Dost thou lament so sadly after reconciliation with me, and my return to thee ? I am glad of it, that was all I aimed at ; I have attained my end ; come, come, thou art welcome to me, come my dear, my lovely child, let me

wipe thy tear-bedewed cheeks, and kiss thee again; I am glad my rod and anger work so kindly, I will return to thee with love and sweetest embraces. Thus doth our Lord return with loving-kindness and tender mercies, and they shall be as if he had not cast them off: there is no way probable or possible to bring God or his ark back but this, and shall we not take this course? It is true, it is a doubtful and dangerous case, we are not certain he will return, but yet there is a *maybe*, a *who-can-tell*, in it: we are sure, running from him, and sinning against him, with a hard heart, will undoubtedly rob us of him, and ruin us; but we have lost more labour to less purpose, therefore, let us turn to the Lord with all our heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning, &c. Joel ii. 12, 13: and then say, as God directs them, ver. 14, "Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him, even a meat offering and a drink offering unto the Lord our God?" Oh, how well doth God take such a conduct! How willing is he to return back to us! only he expects we should be sensible of his withdrawing, and bitterly lament after him.

8. If we do not lay to heart the loss of God's presence and ordinances, God will make us lament on other accounts: if he design us good, he will pinch us till we feel, and cry out; if not, we shall be left to lament hopeless, and helpless in hell torments. If we will not lay to heart spiritual judgments, God threatens to send a curse upon us, and to curse our blessings, Mal. ii. 2. How? why, if men prize not their temple privileges, God can blast the fruits of the earth, Hag. i. 9, "Ye looked for much, and lo it came to little, and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it," or blow it away; why? saith the Lord of Hosts? "because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man to his own

house." Self-seeking here is self-undoing; men ruin themselves by neglecting God's interest; if men will not lament the ark's captivity, God will make Judah go into captivity.* If men lay not to heart the mourning ways of Zion, God hath a way to make them go without strength before the pursuer.† Men can well dispense with the loss of the pleasant things of the sanctuary, it shall be tried how they will regard the loss of their temporal pleasant enjoyments.‡ If men lament not the gates of Zion, the gates of the city shall lament and mourn, and being desolate, the city in a widowed state shall sit upon the ground.|| If professing people lay not to heart sad and silent sabbaths, God may make the land to keep her sabbaths.§ Great and fair houses must be desolate without inhabitant,¶ because God's house is desolate, and none regardeth. God can tell how to meet with the selfish and heedless: if they regard not God's interest, God will care as little for theirs. He can tell how to come near you in matters of sense,** when you make nothing of what concerns your souls; and ordinances of God will then be good, when sickness, pain, poverty, or death arrest you—or these spiritual things will be good when out of your reach, and you shut up in the prison of hell, where there is weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, Psal. cxli. 6, "When their judges are overthrown in stony places, they shall hear my words, for they are sweet." When that sad plague of sweating sickness was here in England, how much were proud nobles in apparent love with faithful ministers? how glad were they of advice from them? then ordinances were of more worth than purses full of gold. God can make his ministers

* Lam. i. 3.

† Lam. i. 4, 6.

‡ Lam. i. 7, 10, 11.

|| Isa. iii. 26.

§ 2 Chron. xxxvi. 21.

¶ Isa. v. 9.

** See Micah ii. 4, 5.

to be prized by the profanest scorers; yea, he knows how to make a wounding sword to open a way through their bleeding sides, for instructions to enter the most flinty hearts, as Bernard told his ranting brother.

9. How long must the Lord wait for your sensible lamentations? We are soon weary of the yoke, and think it long to wander in the wilderness; sometimes we are for returning back into Egypt, and then all, in post haste for Canaan, as Israel in the desert.* The captive exile hasteneth that he may be loose, and not die in the pit;† but then we would break prison, and are loth to take God's way, or stay God's time; this retards rather than quickens our deliverance. God puts us to our *how longs*, because we put him to his *how longs*; "How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?" Jer. iv. 14. "How long will it be ere you attain to innocency?" Hosea viii. 5. "O Jerusalem! wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be?" Jer. xiii. 27. We were in haste for a restoration many years ago, as Moses for Miriam, "Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee;" God saith, "If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days?" Numb. xii. 13, 14. But our heavenly Father hath spit in our face in the open sight of the world, and we have been shut out of his house well near three times seven years; yet alas, it is to be feared we are not evangelically ashamed. Absalom was three years at Geshur, and two years at Jerusalem, and saw not the king's face;‡ and pretended dissatisfaction therewith. Oh! but where is our real longing to enjoy the Lord in his ordinances? Alas! it is not length of time that will put our hearts into frame. When at last will God raise up some awakening

* Numb. xiv. 4. with v. 40.

† Isaiah li. 14.

‡ 2 Sam. xiii. 33. xiv. 28.

Samuel, that shall sound the alarm in the ears of all Israel? Oh! when shall we awake out of our long sleep? when shall we see our need of God in his ordinances? when shall our souls lament after God to purpose? surely it is time to bestir ourselves once at last.

10. Can we lament to any else that will or can hear or help us? May not kings or great ones say as a king did once to a crying woman, who said, "Help, my Lord, O king." He said, "If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee?"* Alas! we may say, "Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains. Truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel, Jer. iii. 23. The greatest princes are not to be trusted. God thinks fit to frustrate our expectations from men; to disappoint our carnal confidence in man. "Surely men of low degree are vanity," if they have a mind to help they cannot; "and men of high degree are a lie," if they can help; yea, if any promise to help they will not; our best course then is to pour out our hearts before him, and say, "God is a refuge for us," Psal. lxii. 8, 9: for all power is God's, ver. 11. We may say as David, "I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man would know me; refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul; I cried unto thee, O Lord," Psal. cxlii. 4, 5. The comforter that should relieve our souls is far away. There is none to guide poor Zion, of all the sons whom she hath brought forth; neither is there any that taketh her by the hand of all the sons that she hath brought up, Isa. li. 18. "As for us, our eyes as yet failed for our vain help; in our watching we have watched for a nation that could not save us."† We are as Naphtali, and have been strug-

* 2 Kings vi. 26, 27.

† Lam. iv. 17.

gling as sore, for a firm masculine parliament, as the ancient primitive church long travailed for a man child, a christian emperor; we had one. They also struggled for uniting the Protestant subjects, and alleviating our grievances; they are broken up. We had a second which set themselves to help us; but the children were come to the birth, and there was no strength to bring forth, all attempts proved abortive. Since our Moses and Aaron (by votes or disputes) have represented our case, sought favour, and used means of help, the tale of our bricks has been doubled, the spirits of men more enraged, our favour abhorred, and a keener sword is put into some men's hands to execute the law with more severity; and is it not time to have recourse to God? We are not permitted so much as to petition to men, and make a true representation of our case; that way is barred, and all other doors are locked up: what else can we do but lament after the Lord? he is able to help, he is willing, and hath promised. Oh! let us go to our God. There and there only we may ease our hearts, and find help: let us lift up our eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh our help; "Our help cometh from the Lord which made heaven and earth," Psal. cxxi. 2.

CHAP. IV.

DESCRIPTION OF PERSONS PARTICULARLY CALLED UPON TO LAMENT.

II. WHO are the persons or people that are to lament after the Lord? I answer,

1. Unconverted persons. These have the greatest reason to lament after the ordinances of God, and the God of ordinances; for alas, those poor souls are "without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world," Eph. ii. 12. Ah sinners! what will become of you if you live and die without God? You had better be without money, trade, credit, ease, house, relations, clothes, meat, every thing, all things in the world, than without God: what will your lives or any thing advantage you without God? Alas! have you lived thus long in the world without an interest in God? How know you but death is at the door? and what will you do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation that shall come from far? To whom will ye flee for help, and where will ye leave your glory? Isa. x. 3, 4. Without me, saith God, they shall bow down under the prisoners, and they shall fall under the slain: woe to you, if death the king of terrors meet you, and God the king of heaven be not on your side. What a woful case was Saul in when the Philistines were upon him, and God was departed from him?* Oh when sickness, diseases, death, and thy own conscience make war against thee, and thou hast no God to flee to, how sad thy case! Alas, friends, estate, honours, or all the world can do for thee, will be insignificant: if thou live and die without God, thou must be for ever banished from him. And how canst thou in an ordinary way expect to have relation to God, without the means of his appointment for obtaining that end? The ark of the covenant is the way of covenanting; the preaching of the gospel is the door of faith;† saving faith, by which the soul is entitled to

* 1 Sam. xxviii. 15.

† Rom. x. 14.

the favour of God, comes by hearing, and if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.* Little reason have the mad, frantic world to rejoice over the slain witnesses, to make merry, and send gifts one to another because these prophets tormented them,† that is, would not let them go quietly to hell, but would be jogging them out of their security, and summoning them to repentance. No, no, their departure may be like Ezekiel's book, written within and without, with lamentation, and mourning, and woe.‡ Ah poor sinners! God seems to stop ministers' mouths, and saith, thou shalt not be to them a reprover,|| my Spirit shall strive no more with them;§ feed them no more, that which dieth let it die, and that which is to be cut off let it be cut off;¶ as if he had said, I will concern myself no further about them, they regarded not my counsels, and slept away the day of grace, and refused the calls of God, now they shall be given up, as a branch cut off from the tree, I will prune it no more, but take it away, John xv. 2, and lay it under that gospel curse, "Never fruit grow on thee from henceforth for ever." Or like the flourishing vineyard of the Jewish church, Isa. v. 5, 6, "Take away the hedge thereof, break down the stone wall, lay it waste, it shall not be pruned, nor digged, but there shall come up briars and thorns, I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it." And have men cause to rejoice in this? Is it not rather ground of the greatest lamentation, as a prologue and forerunner of damnation, and a token of rejection? Will any but madmen rejoice at the approach of calamity, upon themselves? Or will any but frantic bedlamites triumph that those are gone who stopped them from running into a pit or a fire, or that kept them from dashing out

* 2 Cor. iv. 3.

† Rev. xi. 10.

‡ Ezek. ii. 10.

|| Ezek. iii. 26.

§ Gen. vi. 3.

¶ Zech. xi. 9.

their own brains? We think those young men fools, that are glad their parents are dead who restrained their vicious courses. If carnal men's eyes were open to know the advantages of a powerful ministry, or pure ordinances, they would lay it to heart as the most dreadful evil that ever befel them, and lament after the Lord with bitter cries, for the return of the means of grace, and say: "O Lord, is light gone, and my soul left still in darkness? is life gone, and I dead still? are means of salvation departed, and my soul left in imminent danger of perishing? Many tears did ministers shed for me: O what prayers to God! what beseechings of me to be reconciled to God! but I regarded not. Woe is me, these ambassadors of peace are called home, or have their mouths shut, what can I now expect but a proclamation of war? Lord, have mercy on me, and send those men of God to knock again at my door, and I hope I shall give them and their message better entertainment." Thus carnal persons should say; but alas, such as most need, do often least regard these things, God knows; and after twenty years lying in the grave, we may fear they will not still believe, though we should arise from the dead. If however, after all this, there be little or no hopes of those persons laying this matter to heart, I will turn to another class.

2. Ye gracious souls, lament you after the Lord.— Though Israel play the harlot yet let not Judah offend; though wicked men will not understand nor lay any thing to heart, yet let God's people, his children lay to their hearts the displeasure of God, and with bitter cries lament after their departing Father. Oh that it could be said in this case, as God's own testimony is, Hos. xi. 12, *Ephraim compasseth me about with lies*, pretending to worship God, when they intend nothing

less, *and the house of Israel with deceit*, cheating men, thinking to deceive God himself, *but Judah yet ruleth with God*, that is, keeps up his interest at the throne of grace and prevails with me, and is faithful with the saints, in point of communion and reputation, or with the most holy.* O blessed Judah! but doth not God's Judah need stirring up to lament after the Lord! Alas! how senseless and slack are the best hearts in this exercise! Who would have once imagined that such a spirit of worldliness, security, and neutrality, would have seized upon God's own children? Ah friends! can you let God depart either from your spirits or from the assemblies of his people, and not stir up yourselves to take hold of him? Who would have thought that God himself or the tokens of his presence should go from you without weeping eyes, or mournful complaints? Who must hold him if you will not? Who must fetch him back if you will not follow him, and call after him? You that have interest in him; you that have given up yourselves to him; you that have had sweet experience of his presence; and now pretend more love to him than any one else; you that he hath drawn with cords of love, will not you lament after him? Have not you some reason to say as the nation of Israel, Hos. ii. 7, "I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better with me than now," especially considering how he hath hedged your way with thorns, disappointed you in your overtaking your other lovers; have not your souls grown lean, and ready to famish in other ways? Have you not in all this time discerned some difference betwixt the pure and wholesome waters of the sanctuary, and the impure puddle water of men's traditions? Yea, have you not to your cost discerned some difference by your dear-

* Marg.

bought experience, betwixt the powerful ordinances, and the very same or similar formally, heartlessly, and lifelessly administered? Tell me, deal ingenuously and candidly in the case; have not your souls been ready to pine for want of provision? Have you not even been tempted to loath some dishes handed to you by blind or slovenly cooks? have you not been in danger of being rocked asleep by such truths as should have awaked you, and would, if they had been faithfully managed? Have you not been forced to eat that which some have trodden under their feet, and to drink that which some have fouled with their feet? * Alas, sirs! whatever others have, have not you some reason to lament with holy David? Psal. lxxiii. 1, 2, "O God thou art my God, early will I seek thee; my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is, to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary:" O my Lord, time hath been that my soul hath been satisfied as with marrow, and fatness, and my doubts resolved, graces quickened, lusts discovered and weakened in thine ordinances, so that I could truly say from my own experience, God was in them of a truth; but alas, for this long time matters have been otherwise, I have attended (as I judged) in obedience to thy command, and have sometimes met with airy notions or sapless things, or mixture of errors, or such complimenting of God with a dry formality, that methinks my soul is dried away with this light food: I have reason to lay the blame upon myself, and charge my own unprofitable heart as the proper cause; but O my Lord, I long for a heart-searching, state-distinguishing, sin-rebuking word. O when shall my soul enjoy heart-melting ordinances! Thou that adaptest means

to the end, and dost use to produce conversion, consolation, and confirmation, by most proper efficient instruments, give suitable means of grace, and grace by the means; "O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known, in wrath remember mercy; and let all thy children say, Amen." Hab. iii. 2.

3. You that are young, of the rising generation, that are coming up, and coming on, in the room of your ancestors, it becomes you to lament after the Lord and his ark. Be it known to you that the piety of your predecessors will not be your sanctuary or security.— You may please yourselves with being the children of the church, but think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father;* for God is not under any obligation to you; you may be children of the devil, and may be cast into hell under that title:† no, no, you must have a faith of your own, a personal, as well as a federal relation to God. It is disputed at what age children are to stand on their own legs for personal faith, at five, or seven, or ten, or twelve; to be sure, at years of discretion, when they can discern betwixt good and evil, they are to choose for themselves, and are not to depend on relation to their parents any longer; however, they may improve their parent's covenant. But, O children! begin betimes to cry after your Father: God loves to be followed, as with the hosannas once, so with the small voice, and to be held with the little hands of the young: try what you can do with him; say not, you need him not; you cannot set up without him, you cannot live safely without him; and I am sure you are undone if you die without relation to him, and you may die young. O then make sure of God, you are cast upon him from your birth; say to

* Mat. iii. 9.

† John viii. 44. Luke xvi. 25.

him, thou art my God from my mother's womb, so shall you be a seed to serve him, and shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation.* What an advantage will it be when your father and mother forsake you, by unkindness or death, if you have a God to take you up.† If God hath been your trust from your youth, he will not cast you off in old age;‡ but if you run away from God, all your younger days, with what confidence can you lament after him in old age? May he not say, go to the gods and lusts which you have served and gratified? you come but to me for a reserve, with self-ends, and because you can follow your sensual pleasures no longer; you would never have had recourse to me, if you had been capable still to have made as good a bargain of the world as you were wont: you followed your lusts with a young and swift foot, but me you can but follow with a slow snail's pace; a little of this lamenting more early had been more acceptable. It is a hard venture, an awful risk, if you go on laughing in the devil's ways, to take it for granted that you will be cordial in lamenting after God in old age, and that the Lord will receive you: and as you would enjoy God, lament after the ordinances of God. Thy testimonies, saith David, have I taken as an heritage for ever. O blessed heritage! O precious patrimony! beg it, plead for it, be not content without it. Whatever other inheritance you have, say, Lord, mine ears have heard, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old. || What providences were arranged to settle ordinances? what excellent, powerful, heart-warming preaching they had? how God wrought wonders on the consciences of men by his word and Spirit? what pure worship they had,

*. Psal. xxii. 10, 30.

† Psal. xxvii. 10.

‡ Psal. lxxi. 5, 9, 17, 18.

|| Psal. xlv. 1.

communion of saints, and wholesome discipline, and what sweet intercourse with thyself in all? now, Lord, thou hast threatened, and in part executed this spiritual plague, the famine of thy word, obstructing and removing ordinances, and thy hand is still upon us; thy end is not attained; Papists threaten to darken our heaven and totally to put out our lights, and thyself seemest to menace the complete removal of our candlestick; stop, O Lord! execute not thy whole displeasure. Alas! shall we be that cursed generation, that must again be involved in worse than Egyptian darkness? Alas! who shall live when God doth this? God forbid that we should outlive this bright sunshine of the gospel, that we should not be heirs of our fathers' spiritual privileges, as well as earthly patrimonies. Oh! when these are lost, we must sadly sigh and say, what have our forefathers been doing that they have deprived us of the means of our soul's good? Must they and we meet in hell? they for non-improvement, we for non-enjoyment? Woe is to us! cursed children of cursed parents! Lord, if we have not peace, or plenty, let us have the gospel of peace and true piety; the gospel of grace, and grace by the gospel, and then we shall say, "the lines are fallen to us in pleasant places, we have a goodly heritage," Psal. xvi. 6.

4. Aged persons and householders. You that are parents have reason to lament after the Lord of the ark, and the ark of the Lord, that the waters of the sanctuary may run both with a clear and strong current to your families and posterity. Alas! we that have children, have been instrumental in propagating depravity and guilt, and wrath to our offspring, and what can we do to heal and help them? But if the Lord be our God, he hath promised to be the God of our seed. God forbid we should entail a curse on our

posterity, and give them occasion to curse us to all eternity. What unworthy parents are those that have fair estates left them, and by their prodigality leave their children beggars or bankrupts! But oh! how sad would it be to deprive our posterity of this gospel-legacy? it would be both their loss and our own. Lord, suffer us not to go off the stage in a snuff, and leave such a stench behind us. Better we had never been born, than to blaze and be consumed in hell flames, we and our descendants of following generations bundled up in faggots together. God thinks good to bind up parents and their seed in the bond of the covenant. O Lord! we are resolved to follow after thee for the sure mercies of David. Be thou our God, and we shall have better hopes for our seed. O remember that word, Isa. lix. 21, "As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord, my Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever." This word is full and satisfying:—Thy Spirit shall be upon me and mine in sanctification.—Thy words in my mouth, and children's mouths in profession, and solemn worship.—They shall not depart from my seed's seed to many generations.—No, not for ever.—God, even Jehovah undertakes this.—It is through Christ the Redeemer that is come to Sion.—It is a new covenant mercy.—And it doth concern all converts, even such as turn from transgression in Jacob; and am not I one of these? My dear Lord, make thou this word good to me and mine, thou that livest for ever and ever. I shall live in my posterity, when I shall be here no more, let the gospel message survive me, and the gospel grace live in them when I am gone. Oh!

cut not off thy kindness from my seed ; let not them that follow me be deprived of that which I have found so much sweetness in. O that my Ishmaels may live in thy sight !* What will become of such as are born in sin, if they want means of conviction and conversion ? There is much ado to awaken the sleepy consciences of our dead posterity under quickening ordinances. O what then would become of these, if such helps were gone ? How could I endure to see or foresee the destruction of my own offspring ? Oh ! it cuts me to the heart to think of the damnation of any, much more those of my own flesh : Lord prevent. I will pray in hope, live in hope, die in hope of the continuance of gospel privileges.

5. Ministers must make it their work to lament after the Lord. You, you are the persons mainly concerned ; you must sound an alarm to awake others ; you are appointed by the Lord as instruments to carry on this work ; and if ever God do return, he will excite his servants to rouse themselves and others to this exercise ; as Samuel did here, “ Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests : howl, ye ministers of the altar : come, lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God.”† Yea, let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, “ Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them ; wherefore should they say among the people, where is their God ? ‡ Alas my brethren ! have you been so long cast out of God’s public work and worship, even twenty long years, and have you not yet learned to lament ? Shall our master discard us from his service, and not judge us worthy to blow our trumpets of rams’ horns, or break a pitcher, or hold

* Gen. xvii. 18.

† Joel i. 13.

‡ Joel ii. 17.

a lamp for him? * Surely he is very sorely provoked, shall I say, three shepherds he cut off in one month? † nay, near three thousand in one day: and hath drawn out his wrath to a great length, and is there no fault in us? Yes, certainly our Father would not have fixed such a brand, or poured so much contempt upon us, upon us particularly, but he must have found great fault in us; he hath doubtless seen much amiss in us. He doth not use to single out a class of men to shoot his arrows at, without cause; we cannot excuse instruments, but certainly we have deserved all this at God's hands; is not God punishing Eli's house for the iniquity he knoweth of? ‡ Let us, my brethren, deal faithfully and impartially with ourselves before God and the world, cast the first stone at ourselves, and at last justify the Lord, by taking shame to ourselves. Hath God set us in this office only to tell others of their faults? Have we not reason to call to remembrance our own faults this day? I hope such as are truly gracious have made this reflection many times. Nor is it my present design to rake in this muddy channel; only it becomes us to inquire why God hath made us contemptible before all the people, Mal. ii. 1—9. My present object is to excite our lamenting after the Lord, that if it be possible we may fetch him again. I may say as the prophet, Mal. i. 9, "And now, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious unto us. This hath been by your means." O it is well if our people have not reason to say so of their ministers, (howbeit sincere repentance will not make men throw it off themselves by laying it on others,) but we may sadly echo, yes, yes, it hath been by our means, we have put out our candles, by the thief we have lodged therein; we have obscured our glory by

* Josh. vi. 8.

† Zech. xi. 8.

‡ 1 Sam. iii. 13.

sinning; we have robbed our people of the ark, and exposed them to seduction and destruction by the abominations that have been found amongst us. Let us fall earnestly to our work of preaching, reforming, praying, and calling God again; who knows but if we mourn among our people, they may lament also? * Our watery eyes may affect the people's hard hearts. If the fishers mourn and such as angle at the brooks lament, † our people will be moved, and God will hear our universal cry, and awake for us. Some will needs have our wearing black to import our mourning; if so, let us not be hypocrites, but lament indeed, not merely in show. Some observe, that people are much formed after the preaching, examples, and dispositions of their teachers: but it is to be feared, they will sooner dance after our mirth-stirring pipes, than mourn after our pious elegies: however God forbid the blame or blemish should proceed from us. "For Zion's sake let us not hold our peace, and for Jerusalem's sake let us not rest until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth," Isa. lxii. 1. For God saith, ver. 6, 7, "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace, day nor night. Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth."

6. Magistrates, supreme and subordinate, should lament after the Lord. It is not a work below them, though they may think it a work above us, to remind them of it; but humble persons have been monitors to mighty princes. An inconsiderable page rouseth up Philip, king of Macedon with this admonition, "Remember, sir, you are a man." Daniel's counsel was seasonable (he wisheth it may be acceptable) to the

* Matt. xi. 17.

† Isaiah xix. 8.

Babylonian monarch, to break off his sins by righteousness, and his iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor, if it might be a lengthening of his tranquillity, Dan. iv. 27. God gives Jeremiah a commission, to say to the king, and to the queen, "Humble yourselves, sit down." * It is not unbecoming the greatest princes to worship at the foot-stool of the King of kings. It is prophesied of the gospel church, that "kings shall be her nursing fathers, and queens her nursing mothers," Isa. xlix. 23. Yea, saith the Lord, "they shall bow down to thee, with their faces towards the earth," &c. Which is to be understood, not in a literal, Popish sense, of a civil subjection of their power to the proud usurpations of that man of Rome; but a voluntary resignation of all, to the great Jehovah, and our blessed Jesus; an undervaluing of their earthly honours in comparison of spiritual privileges; as Constantine the Great, and Theodosius, each of whom professed he would rather be a member of Christ, than head of the empire. It is not below majesty on earth to lament after the God of heaven. David, Asa, Jehoshaphat, and Hezekiah followed the Lord with fears and cares, prayers and tears, and how doth God approve and applaud the tender hearted Josiah? 2 Chron. xxxiv. 27, 28, "Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof; and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me," (mark the outward tokens of inward sorrow) "I have even heard thee also, saith the Lord." And when Josiah's grandfather, Manasseh, was unruly, God took a course to humble him, and brought him to seek God by earnest prayer, and great humiliation; † but when

* Jer. xiii. 18.

† 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11, 12, 23, 24. ch. xxxvi. 12, 13.

his father Amon, and his son Zedekiah, did not walk in those mournful steps of penitent lamentings after the Lord, God took another course with them, and cut them off. God hath even brought heathen kings upon their knees, to lament after God in the best manner they could; as the king of Nineveh, Jonah iii. 5, 6; and God took it well, ver. 10. Outward humiliation also prevented Ahab's temporal destruction, 1 Kings xxi. 27, 29. And when God threatened Rehoboam by Shishak's invasion, and Shemaiah's commination, the princes of Israel, and the king humbled themselves, and said, "The Lord is righteous," 2 Chron. xii. 6, 7. And God saith, "I will not destroy them, but grant them some deliverance, or deliverance for a little while." Much more, if princes and nobles be sincere in humiliation for sin, and lamentation after the Lord and universal reformation: O what mercy doth the Lord reserve for such! Thus in the days of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, the instances are numerous and pregnant. O that God would stir up the hearts of the governors of his people, to say, "Surely we and our people have provoked the Lord against us." Yea, it is well if our hands have not been chief in the trespass. O that, as we have been exemplary in sinning, we might be exemplary in our repentance; as we have driven God from us and our people, so we might be the first to fetch him back again. God forbid that we should say with Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord?" or refuse to let the servants of the Lord go and serve him according to scripture rules, though they may differ from us in some modes of worship. Yea, it is fit the governors of Judah should say in their hearts, "The inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be our strength in the Lord of hosts their God."* These,

* Zech. xii. 5.

these are the chariots and horsemen of Israel, as once a king said of a prophet.* God forbid, we governors should arm or animate some protestants against their brethren, while papists are putting us on, and warming themselves by the fire of their own kindling; and when they spy their opportunity, will take advantage of the conflict they have encouraged, and destroy the combatants. Let us rather improve our utmost interest to make them friends; and bespeak their joint prayers for us. And since we need the Lord, and his appointments as well as others, as much as the meanest of our subjects, let us also follow the Lord with bitter cries and lamentations: "The princes digged the well, the nobles of the people digged it, by the direction of the lawgiver, with their staves."† Why may not we also work hard in digging these sacred wells of ordinances? and then cry out, "Spring up, O well!" and also put on others, saying, "Sing ye unto it?" May not we too pass through this valley of Baca (or weeping) and make a well? the rain filling the pools;‡ and so this valley of Baca, will be a valley of Berachah. || Our speaking comfortably to those laborious Levites that teach the good knowledge of the Lord,§ will reach their hearts, and so we shall bring upon ourselves the blessing of them that were ready to perish. May we not even call them up hither to public worship, and send them to the people in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of peace. We, even we, have need of ordinances as well as others; we have ignorant minds, stubborn wills, strong passions, violent temptations; and of all sorts of persons, nobles are most unwilling to put their necks to the work of the Lord.¶ We have greater hindrances in the way to heaven, and therefore

* 2 Kings xiii. 14. † Numb. xxi. 17, 18. ‡ Psal. lxxxiv. 6.

|| Blessing. § 2 Chron. xxx. 22. ¶ Neh. iii. 5.

need better helps than others. Oh ! let it never be said of us, that when the poor are but ignorant souls, foolish, and know not the way of the Lord, that we, the great men, noblemen and gentlemen, that know much indeed, but do less for God, nay more against him, that we should altogether break the yoke, and burst the bonds : * our interest is greater, and influence more upon others, therefore our sin of neglect will be greater, and account heavier. Lord, let us have means of grace, and grace by means : be thou our portion in this, and another world, or of all men we shall be most miserable ; our loss will be more dreadful, our torments more intolerable ; as we read of one of our own degree in sacred writ, who in this world was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, but in the other world was found in hell, and being in torments, was denied one drop of water to cool his tongue. † O Lord ! suffer us not to riot and rant here, and be cast out from thy presence hereafter ; but let us lament after thee now, that we may everlastingly enjoy the manifestations of thy favour.

7. Let christian churches, congregations, and societies lament after the Lord. Our dearest Lord seems to depart from them : oh that once at last we could discern the sad symptoms of his removal ! This is the case in the chapter before us, 1 Sam. vii. 5, “ Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, v. 6. and they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted on that day ;” why they met in Mizpeh, whether because Samuel judged Israel there, or it had an altar or place of prayer, I shall not dispute : ‡ or what this drawing out water was, whether it was the water of trial, or a ceremony used at such solemnities, or water of penitential tears, which is most likely : these tears

* Jer. v. 4, 5. † Luke xvi. 19, 23, 24. ‡ Vid. Poli Syn. Crit. in loc.

running from their eyes, betokened and accompanied their affected and affectionate hearts running after the Lord ; one while mourning for the sins that banished him, another laying to heart their loss of him, and with an earnest eager heart breathing in prayer after him : this was their practice, Judg. ii. 1—5. where an angel of the Lord doth reckon up—God's kindnesses to them—their duty to God—their ill requital of God by disobedience—and God's displeasure against them. Upon which the people lift up their voice and wept ; and so great was that weeping, that the place received its title from it ; they called the name of that place Bochim, that is, the place of weepers ; they were baptized in their own tears : Oh ! cried they, one to another, brother, neighbour, do not you hear these heavy tidings ? God is angry ; the Almighty commenceth a suit against us ; he hath sent a summons to us, drawn up an indictment against us ; who is able to contend with him ? We are conscious to ourselves that we are guilty, deeply guilty ; we deserve to be forsaken of God, for we have forsaken him ; thus they looked at one another with grieved hearts, seeing others weep, they fell a weeping, and cried bitterly with a concordant outcry, Lord, come, come again, leave us not in the hands of these devoted Canaanites, who bear a mortal grudge against us ; a bitter and hasty nation, a people cruel and skilful to destroy. Another instance you have in Exod. xxxiii. 1—5, where God chides them, seems to disown them, as if they were not his people, but belonging to Moses ; he tells them he will send an angel before them, but he will not go with them, for they are a stiff-necked people. The passage saith, “when the people heard these evil tidings, they mourned, and no man put on him his ornaments.” Alas ! alas ! say they, doth God take his leave ? Will he depart, and not go with us, but substi-

tute an angel in his room? What can an angel do? Can an angel bear our manners, forgive our sins, and supply our wants? No, no, all the angels in heaven cannot do that for us which we need: an angel of the Lord may do much in opposing and destroying our enemies, and defending us, but we are conscious to ourselves that we are a rebellious people, have a stiff neck that none can break or bow but God; and though it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a sin-avenging judge, yet there is some encouragement if we have in the midst of us a covenanted God; yet, yet, we have hopes thou wilt be a tender-hearted Father. Lord, we follow thee naked,* quite stript of any aid but thine: our late guilt hath made us naked as to defence, and we make ourselves naked as to ornaments, and have no manner of excuse for our wicked conduct; scourge us, O Lord, but forsake us not. We broke off our earrings to make a golden calf, now we put off the rest of our garments, as not being worthy of one rag, and as having forfeited all our mercies: our fine attire shall go, we will strip ourselves in a holy revenge, that having put off our clothes, we may follow the faster after thee with sighs and tears. O that we could also put off our sins with our garments, and so put on the spirit of obedience to thy will.

But this is what I urge, that Christians in their societies and assemblies, do unanimously and socially join together to lament after the Lord. God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him, Psal. lxxxix. 7. Let Christians provoke one another to this regard for God; let them bring motives to quicken; yea, let them hold up one another by mutual supports in this holy pursuit of God with prayers and tears, as iron sharpens

* Exod. xxxii. 25.

iron, so let us sharpen one another, taking each other by the hand; let us every one call his neighbour under the vine and under the fig-tree;* as Philip found Nathaniel under the fig-tree and told him the joyful tidings of Messiah;† let persons in the same family get together in God's solemn worship, and lament after the Lord; husbands apart, and wives apart;‡ children apart and servants apart, and sometimes all together; let neighbouring families get together, and humble themselves and say, come neighbours, God is gone or going, let us lift up our voices, hands and hearts together, to prevail upon him to return. Alas! we have conversed about our farms, oxen, sheep, and trades together, shall we not at last begin to converse with each other as Christians? We have drank, feasted, played, and been sinfully merry together, and by our sins banished God, and shall we find no time to mourn for our sins and lament after the Lord together? Let villages, towns, and cities gather into assemblies, and christian societies, and do as those mentioned Zech. viii. 21, "The inhabitants of one city shall go to another," not stay till they come to them, "saying," not being mute statues, but lively monitors, "let us go," let us travel to the place of God's solemn worship, "speedily," alas, we have put off such exercises too long, till God is almost past returning, "to pray before the Lord," not to go to such a city, to buy and sell, and get gain, but "to seek the Lord of hosts." Ah! we have lost him, him who is the God of armies, who arms our foes against us. All this shows great zeal for God, and flaming charity to one another, as when men are converted they will draw others to God in his worship, and give a lively example of it in practice.

But it may be objected, that this practice is uncouth,

* Zech. iii. 10. † John i. 45, 48. ‡ Zech. xii. 12.

that this path is untrodden, few it may be said use it in the place where we live, we shall be laughed to scorn for our labour. It is answered ver. 22, "Many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before him." God will greatly multiply converts and so take off the scandal of paucity of worshippers; it is not a few giddy-headed, factious spirits, but it is nations, many and strong, nations rich and potent. Gentile converts flock like doves to the windows, not by compact and fraud, but by peculiar operations of the Spirit in the ministry of the word, people of divers languages, at a great distance from one another. The same spirit actuates all gospel worshippers, to make them flock to God in ordinances; yea, warlike nations, and islands afar off, unapproachable or invincible by men, shall be conquered by the gospel; as it is said of Britain, though the Romans could scarce come to it, yet our Lord subdued it:* you need not fear want of good company; your zeal itself may provoke others; one active Christian in a place shall have companions in God's work in due time; and how dost thou know but thou wilt find some spark of goodness in some of thy neighbours that thy invitation may blow up, and draw forth? Try them by a gentle call, and thou mayest find more of God in them than ever thou wast aware of; possibly bashfulness, sense of weakness, want of acquaintance with Christians, and want of a call and opportunity have kept some lights under a bushel, which if brought out of their concealment, and a little snuffed, might shine bright in the church.

But it may be said, alas, I am a person of weak gifts, I cannot take a part in any societies, I can be of no use, but a burden.

* Romanis inaccessa, Christo vero subdita.

In reply I may say, thou needest help so much the more; hence it follows, ver. 23, "That ten men shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew;" like little children that are not able to go of themselves, being afraid to fall, will get hold of the hem of their father's garment, to hold them up, and strengthen them to walk more securely, or to direct them in a way that they have not known. Sincere proselytes will look after the communion of saints. The Apostle mentions fellowship in the gospel from the first day, Phil. i. 5, and there is great advantage from it, for Solomon saith, "two are better than one," Eccl. iv. 9—11, which he illustrates there in several cases, on which I shall not enlarge; but it is certain you may find great help in the communion of saints.

But you ask, how shall I know they are saints, or fit to join with? I may be deceived and misled into by-ways of error.

I answer, we have heard that God was with his apostles by wonderful signs, gifts, and miracles, who were besides distinguished by holiness of conversation; and if there are appearances of God being for a people or among a people, you may safely associate with such as God thinks fit to own, and communicate himself to; when I am convinced from the bright beams of gospel light, and from the powerful influences and convictions of the Spirit, that this is indeed the way of God. I am then resolved to inquire after God in it, and join with them that travel in it heaven-wards.

CHAP. V.

DIRECTIONS AND ASSISTANCE TO FORWARD THE EXERCISE PRACTISED BY ISRAEL.

III. YOU may next be directed to some things which may contribute to your furtherance or assistance in lamenting after the Lord. What course should we take both to perform this duty aright, and to obtain what we lament after, namely, either the God of ordinances, or the ordinances of God?

Here I might repeat what was mentioned in the explication, by way of instruction: as,

1. They were inclined after the Lord. It were well if sinners would but stop their vain career, stand still, pause upon it, bethink themselves, and have a tendency God-wards; this is the first step to repentance, see Jer. viii. 6.

2. Settled after the Lord. Oh that men were assured upon good grounds, that their hearts were well fixed, piously disposed, and devoted to God, as our Saviour, who stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem,* or as Paul, Acts xxi. 13.

3. Congregated, gathered, united together, to go hand in hand after the Lord, Zeph. ii. 1, "Gather yourselves together, yea gather together, O nation not desired!" Gather yourselves by mutual accommodation, and sincere repentance, to get under the wing of God, as chickens under the hen, or (as the allusion in that text is) that ye be not as chaff that is dissipated by the wind, verse 2, for there is an affinity in the words; sincere repentance unites to God and his people.

* Luke ix. 51.

† קיש *colligite* a קש *palea*, idest contrahite vos, ne sitis sicut palea.

4. They grieved, being full of sorrow, and complained of themselves in seeking after the Lord, Jer. xxxi. 18, "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself:" Oh that I should by my sin forfeit God's presence, and for sin lose it! how miserable am I in this so sad and overwhelming loss!

5. They cried, called after the Lord, by earnest supplication, and expostulation; as it becomes a child to follow his mother with bitter outcries to fetch her back, Jer. xxxi. 9, "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them."* That is the best prayer that flows from love, and follows God with grief and tears from a sincere regard for God, without outward constraint, and slavish fear.

6. They betook themselves to the Lord by faith, repentance, and reformation. O what efficacy is in this course! Judg. x. 13, God saith, "I will deliver you no more," but bids them cry unto the gods whom they had chosen, v. 14. For they had cried to the Lord, v. 10, and confessed sin, yet God seems peremptory in denying aid; then they reinforce their confession and supplication, and withal added reformation, v. 16. They put away the strange gods from among them, and served the Lord, and see the blessed effect, his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel, and he delivers them. No way like this.

7. They acquiesced in the Lord, were fully contented and satisfied with the Lord, both as to the object of worship, and manner of worshipping: and O for such a frame as that! Isa. xxvi. 13, "O Lord our God, other lords besides thee have had dominion over us, but by thee only will we make mention of thy name," that is, by thy precepts, according to thy institutions

* Marg. with favours, (so the word וּבְתַחֲנוּנַיִם signifies from חָנַן misertus, gratificatus est, doluit.)

will we worship thee ; our fear towards thee shall be no more taught by the precepts of men ;* we will worship thee only in thy own way ; and by thee, that is, in thy strength, by the assistance of thy grace, thou alone shalt be the author and object of our love, desire, pleasure and delight. “ Ashur shall not save us, we will not ride upon horses, neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, ye are our gods, for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy,” Hos. xiv. 3. These are the duties implied in the text before you, which are required of us all, in this world of sin and sorrow.

But to impress our hearts, and to assist in the due performance of these required duties, I shall propose some considerations in the form of directions, to carry on this work successfully.

1. See to your state and principles ; except you be related to God you will not lament after him, nor be much concerned about him, or his ark, whether going or coming. Relation is the foundation of affection. A child will cry after his own father. Now God is not our father since the fall, till regeneration make a real, and adoption a relative change of our state ; and when we have received the Spirit of adoption, then and never till then, shall we cry, Abba, Father, Rom. viii. 15. They only will cry after God that love him, fear him, and honour him, as a father, with a filial affection, and they only shall be received by him : O therefore, examine your state God-wards ! Hath converting grace under ordinances changed your hearts ? Hath the Spirit awakened your consciences, convinced you of your undone state by nature, transformed you by the renewing of your minds, translated you out of darkness into light ? deal faithfully with your souls in this case : you come into the world with your backs turned upon

* Isaiah xxix. 13.

God, and you will never lament after him without a turn in another direction. Naturally there is an enmity and antipathy in our hearts to God and his ways. Hath God crushed and conquered that disposition, and planted right principles in you, to incline you to him? if yet you find not a divine nature, a new nature produced in you, flatter not yourselves, you will rather run farther from him, than lament after him. Let your souls be chiefly concerned for this first, then for the rest. Union precedes communion: a real title is antecedent to the laying of a claim: a principle of grace is before an actual exercise of it: there must be life before there can be any desire of, or nutrition by food. I have no hopes of prevailing with unconverted souls to lament after God, till they have life and breath, voice and lungs, except formally, for company, or for carnal purposes, which is insignificant. Oh for grace, truth of grace, and a reality of interest in Christ, and all the privileges he hath purchased.

2. Inform yourselves thoroughly of the terms on which you stand with God. Consider how the Lord acts towards us, as to our individual cases, and the nation in general. We shall never lament after him till we see him withdrawn. Ignorance of the state of things with us keeps persons in a senseless frame. What the eye of body or mind sees not, is never laid to heart: make some observations and reflections on things at this day: make also a comparison betwixt former and present times. What think you? Hath not God manifested himself more in his providences for us, than of late? Have we not reason to take up the church's complaint, Psal. xlv. 1, 9, or to expostulate as Gideon Judg. vi. 13, "O my Lord! if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of?" I have told

you how much restraining grace is withdrawn from many; how rare conversion is by ordinances; how much God hath withdrawn both from the societies and spirits of his servants. I shall not trouble you with repetitions; look over those things, compare them with what you see and observe, and if you find the Lord as formerly, be thankful; if otherwise, be humbled, and lament after him. It is to be feared, that if you be observant, discerning Christians, you will yet find out more than hitherto hath been mentioned, both demonstrations of God's removal, and prognostics of future removes. The most excellent and eminent servants of God are snatched away by death from amongst us, and God saith, "they are taken away from the evil to come," Isa. lvii. 1. The spirit of giddiness, atheism, and idolatry is spreading at a strange rate, beyond all parallel. Other things I might mention, but I leave them to your inquiry: only there is one text which methinks is astonishing, Zech. xi. 8, "Three shepherds also I cut off in one month, and my soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me." It is one of the saddest words in all the Bible. Whether they were good or bad shepherds, that were cut off, it is dreadful that it had no better effect than mutual abhorrency. Oh that this was not our case! We lie under woful consequences of God's loathing us, and it is well if men do not loath him. A spirit of opposition to godliness is the sad effect of divine dereliction, which produceth greater spiritual and temporal plagues. Hence he adds, verse 9. "Then said I, I will not feed you, that that dieth, let it die, and that that is to be cut off, let it be cut off, and let the rest eat every one the flesh of another." They shall have no gospel pastors to feed their souls; that is a spiritual plague which fell on the Jews for rejecting Christ. They shall devour one another with cursed

rage and malice, as in seditions, conspiracies, or in their necessity of food by the terrible famine. Thus the Jews were destroyed in Jerusalem's miserable ruin. The like prognostics are upon us. Lord prevent the same effects, and awake our hearts to use God's appointed means for prevention.

3. Make diligent inquiry into the reason of our present and approaching calamities. Is there not a cause? surely "affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground."* Sin is the mother and nurse of sorrow. Is not God bringing our iniquities upon us? Doth not our own wickedness correct us, and our backsliding reprove us?† Doth not this rod say, "Thy ways and thy doings have procured these things unto thee, this is thy wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reacheth unto thine heart," or soul, Jer. iv. 18. Let ministers and people, lay their hands on their hearts, and let us search our consciences and conversations? Is it not I that shut out ministers, as the good woman said, I broke my minister's leg. My pride, unteachableness, unprofitableness, formality, neglect of duty, censurings and uncharitableness, sensuality and wordliness, hypocrisy and lukewarmness, vain glory and mindlessness of God's glory and my soul's eternal good; these, these made all the excluding, banishing, fining, imprisoning laws that ever came out against God's servants; these chiefly have broken up all assemblies, scattered meetings, armed all the officers, retarded our deliverance. By our sins are our enemies strong,‡ and the hands of our friends weak. Alas! it is my own iniquity that hath brought us low, put back a good work, banished God, and lift up the right hand of our enemies; nor is it the sins of the profane,

* Job v. 6.

† Jer. ii. 19.

‡ Peccatis nostris fortes sunt barbari.

but of professors, "Of the rock that begat us we have been unmindful, and forgotten God that formed us, therefore, when the Lord saw it he abhorred us, because of the provoking of his sons and of his daughters," Deut. xxxii. 18, 19. Oh our wretched ingratitude, rebellion, and covenant-breaking, our sins have reached to heaven; therefore our judgments are unparalleled. We may say as Dan. ix. 13, "Under the whole heaven hath not been done, as hath been done upon us." It is well if we have not reason to add also ver. 13, "That all this evil is come upon us, yet made we not our prayer,* before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand thy truth." It is true, we have prayed, but it is well if we have so prayed. Is not the accursed thing to be found amongst us to this day? We have been long in the fire, but are we cleansed? Alas, alas, may not that sad complaint and charge be brought against us, Jer. vi. 28—30, "They are grievous revolvers, walking with slanders, brass and iron, they are all corrupters, the bellows are burnt, the lead is consumed of the fire; the foundler melteth in vain, for the wicked are not plucked away, reprobate silver shall men call them because the Lord hath rejected them." O that this were not our case, and that character also given of the same professing people, Jer. ix. 3—7. But I shall leave Christians to this heart-searching work, beseeching, requiring and charging all persons to deal faithfully with their own souls; find out the Achan that troubles the camp, and stone it; cast lots to find the Jonah that raiseth this tempest, cast it overboard, confess, bewail, reform, supplicate pardon of sin, and who knows but we shall have a calm?

4. Endeavour to impress your hearts with a sense

* *Heb.* intreated the face.

of the evil of God's departure from us: otherwise you will not think it worth the while to spend time in lamenting after him. Come to a heart, a house, a society, a congregation, or the nation, and make inquiry, is God there? If it be answered, no, he is gone wholly or partially, what is then left that is good? Surely if God go, all good goes, and all evil comes, 2 Chron. xv. 3—6. "Now for a long season Israel had been without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law," whether this was under Jeroboam, and his successors, or at some other time, "and in thosetimes there was no peace to him that went out, nor to him that came in, but great vexations were upon all the inhabitants of the countries—for God did vex them with all adversity." Mark it, when God goes, all evil comes. They were without the true, pure, public worship of God, and without a standing ministry, to teach publicly, plainly, and powerfully, but had in their places, false prophets, lying Rabbies, or graceless loiterers, and it may be the people loved to have it so. No wonder if they had civil discords, foreign invasions, ecclesiastical dissensions, all things going to wreck; setting up one ruler against another, so joining in parties and factions; using barbarous cruelties, embroiling all in sad contentions, and imbruing their hands in one another's blood. When God goes he breaks down the hedge of his protecting providence, so that the boar out of the wood wastes his vineyard;* then it is eaten up, trodden down, it shall not be pruned nor digged, but there come up briars and thorns;† yea, he commands the clouds that they rain no rain upon it; what then will become of it? Surely the inclosed vineyard of the church soon becomes a wild common of barbarous infidels. When God removes his candles, darkness comes,

* Psal. lxxx. 12, 13.

† Isa. v. 6, 7.

but when he removes candlesticks also,* Mahomet fills up the room. The famous Asiatic churches are a dreadful instance. If the sun sets, night comes on: if the king be absent, what court can be kept? if Christ stay not, where is the church? if God should leave his glorious mansion in heaven, it would instantly become a dark dungeon of hell: yea, if God depart from a people as a friend, he comes against them as a dreadful foe; if he go away he tears as a lion,† he consumes as a moth: if he hide his face, he comes in wrath, and fury to slay them, Jer. xxxiii. 5. Saul was in a woful plight when God was departed from him, and the Philistines were upon him.‡ Yes, if God depart the devil comes. When the good spirit went from Saul, an evil spirit from the Lord troubled and tormented him, 1 Sam. xvi. 14, 23. Satan was from God, as framing his nature, and commissioning him to punish Saul, but his wickedness and malignity in his designs and actings were from himself. O how glad is the devil to take up that room which God leaves! truly then saith the Lord, Hos. ix. 12, "Woe also to them, when I depart from them;" there is a woe of sinning, and suffering which attends God's departure. Whither will not men run when God forsakes them? If the hand withdraw, the staff falls; if the glass without foot be not held up, it falls, and breaks, and the liquor spills; the very best man is no more daily, than as the Lord makes him; Samson, David, and Peter, will fall if God go; much more they that have no hold of God, or God of them in a covenant way, they will not stop till they reach the height of sin and fall into the depth of hell! Hos. ix. 17, "My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken to him." Hos. vii. 13, "Woe unto them, for

* Rev. ii. 5.

† Hos. v. 14.

‡ 1 Sam. xxviii. 15.

they have fled from me, yea destruction to them, because they have transgressed against me: yea, everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power," 2 Thess. i. 9. Were we kindly affected with all this, we should lament after the Lord. We have reason to tremble, lest it prove our case, and removing his ordinances is a great step to all this; but if we knew what it meant, we should with old Eli have "trembling hearts for the ark of God, 1 Sam. iv. 13.

5. Study the advantages and benefit of having God present with us: as fear of evil is one motive to avoid it, so a desire of the contrary good, adds wings in seeking earnestly for it. When God goes, all good goes. So when God returns or continues with a people, they enjoy all good, inward and outward. The people that have God with them, have a strong guard to defend them, a wise guide to direct them, rich grace to supply them, high honour to advance them, full rest to content them, an abundant reward in the enjoyment of him; they have enough, they need no more. "Happy is the people whose God is the Lord." * Luther's Psalm, that song upon Alamothe, Psalm xlii, is admirable for this; for when the church can say, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble," ver. 1, she builds great confidence and comfort on this solid foundation; ver. 2, "Therefore will not we fear though the earth be removed," &c. Yea, she stands upon this impregnable rock, triumphing over all dangers and enemies, with this word repeated, ver. 7, 11, "The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge:" and "if God be for us who can be against us?" Who would not follow after such a God with prayers, tears, groans, and hearty la-

* Psalm. cxlii. ult.

mentations, that he would return to us and continue with us? Oh! who would not have a hand in bringing back the King, such a King as by his presence can make us truly and eternally happy? See what it is to have God with us, Isa. xlii. 13—16. Yea, it becomes every one to study the usefulness of God's ordinances, that their hearts may be engaged to, and enlarged in lamenting after the ordinances of God? Both these are larger subjects than I can prosecute, to explain the advantages coming to a people by the presence of the ordinances of God, or the God of ordinances. You must look on the ordinances as fruits and tokens of God's special favour, for all have not the ordinances of God, Psal. cxlvii. 19, 20, "He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments, unto Israel: he hath not dealt so with any nation; and as for his judgments, they have not known them." That this sunshine of gospel light is on one place, when not on another, proceeds from a discriminating providence, which sent ambassadors, for the gospel to be brought to it. Surely that is preventing kindness: but when it hath left some impressions on the hearts of men, some myrrh upon the handles of the lock,* such should, yea will lament after him, when he is gone, as the church did: for such have tasted how good the Lord is, and look on the ordinances as their heritage and highest privilege. O that you knew what helps ordinances are, to promote God's work in our hearts, in creating and increasing faith, repentance, love, and new obedience; this is that clear crystal-glass through which we may see the face of God, and be transformed into his image;† that glass in which we may see the face of our souls,‡ and be humbled and ashamed: here you may have your doubts resolved, fears dispersed, hearts satisfied,

* Song v. 5.

† 2 Cor. iii. 18.

‡ James i. 24.

graces quickened, fellowship with God promoted, and your souls prepared for heaven. O that your eyes were opened to see the necessity, excellency, and utility of God's ordinances! I am very confident, that if your souls be as new-born babes, you will have a desire after the sincere milk of the word, having previously tasted that the Lord is gracious, 1 Pet. ii. 2, 3. As for others that want spiritual life and light to discover and feel the marrow of ordinances, no wonder if they slight or despise both the appointments themselves, and such as long for them, and lament the want of them; and therefore I urge this, that you learn by your own experience the sweetness and advantage of enjoying the presence of God in his ordinances.

6. Acquire and maintain a public spirit. O beware of a private selfish spirit, to look only after your own concerns, and worldly interests! This hath been the ruin of the church, and also of particular persons at last, Hag. i. 4, 6, "Is it time for you, O ye! to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste? therefore ye have sown much, and bring in little;" as if he had said, you think to secure your personal and domestic comforts with neglect of my concernments, but I will cross you in that which concerns you, because you are heedless in what concerns me. On the contrary, David concerned himself about God's house, and God built his house, 2 Sam. vii. 2, 11. So true is that declaration of our Saviour, whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.* Self-seeking is the way to self-undoing, self-denying is the only way to self-advancing; scripture and experience prove this. Well then, my advice is, that you chiefly mind the interest of our Lord in the world; and lay as great a stress on this in your

* Matt. xvi. 25.

prayers, as if it were your own case; and indeed it is your own; your little boat hangs on the great ship; but all judge not so, therefore there are few lamenters after the Lord: however, if you would look on Zion's case as your own, and so view it as having yours really involved, it would be both a help and a spur in your lamentings. The more gracious persons have been, the more have they forgot themselves to think of the church. Upon me, saith St. Paul, cometh daily the care of all the churches.* Upon Moses lay the burden of all the people.† Uriah will sympathize and consider the circumstances of the ark, and Israel, and Judah in the camp, and not gratify himself with the delights of the city.‡ Nehemiah inquires after, and condoles with his suffering brethren.¶ Look through the bible and you will find this gracious public spirit breathing in all the servants of God, Psal. cxxxvii. 5, 6, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem! let my right hand forget her cunning: if I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy;"§ as if he had said, I profess myself to be a member of that mystical body, the church, and how can a member rejoice when the body mourns? If the touching of one string of an instrument make the rest move, how can I forbear a sad echo to the church's mournful elegy? shall not her dewy eyes cause mine eyes to water? how can it go well with me when it goes ill with the church? O that I could set self aside! We have need, saith one, to be redeemed from ourselves rather than from the devil, or world.¶ I should make a sweet bartering, and give old for new, if I could shuffle out self, and substitute Christ my Lord in place

* 2 Cor. xi. 23. † Numb. xi. 11. ‡ 2 Sam. xi. 11.

¶ Neh. i. 2, 4. § *Marg.* The head of my joy.

¶ Mr. Rutherford's Letters, p. 17.

of myself. Oh wretched idol! when shall I see thee entirely withdrawn, and Christ wholly put in thy room? Oh that I had but gone as far now as the heathens Primer!* "We are not born for ourselves;" surely then I should not be so much taken up with my own matters, but think on the church. Alas! what is my danger to Zion's damage? if it go well with Zion it shall comfort my heart, whatever my personal troubles be. But I must hang my harp on the willows, while the church is in captivity. Lord, do good in thy good pleasure to Zion, build thou the walls of Jerusalem;† though my broken bones be not set, or though my heart still keep bleeding.

7. Learn the right art of praying and pleading with the Lord! this lamentation is in the way of supplication; a gracious promise is given, Zech. xii. 10, "I will pour upon the house of David, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, princes and people, the spirit of grace and of supplications;" and then follows a great mourning, both in families and in closets. O that this work were set forward! Surely if all the people of England, or only the professing people, would engage in this so needful an occupation, what a mercy would it be! Prayer is needful at all times, in all cases, but much more in such circumstances as ours at present; if any thing bring back a departing God, it must be believing prayer, 2 Chron. vii. 14. "If my people which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." You see the duty; you see the encouragement; prayer is adapted to a distressing state of things, and a mournful dispensation: prayer is the channel of comfort: afflictions prompt us to seek

*. Nobis non nati sumus.

† Psal. li. 18.

out promises, promises to seek faith, faith to seek prayer, prayer to seek and find God. What should God's children do were it not for this privilege of praying? When they cannot preach, and hear, they may pray; when they cannot meet personally together, they may meet at the throne of grace; when they are shut out from petitioning men, they may be admitted to the court of heaven, and the Lord's ears are still open to their cry.* I should think the spirit of prayer to be the best token for good to us; "thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear," Psal. x. 17. Moses besought the Lord, and the Lord seems as if restricted by his prayer; let me alone, saith God.† The people here entreat Samuel not to cease to cry to the Lord for them;‡ and he did pray, and you see the issue. Oh that we could not only pray, but lift up a prayer for the remnant that is left!|| If God return to us, it must be upon the wings of such an elevated prayer. When Sennacherib had sent Rabshakeh to blaspheme God, the scripture account saith, for this cause Hezekiah the king, and the prophet Isaiah, the son of Amos, prayed, and cried to heaven.§ For this cause: if any thing will stimulate God's children to pray, surely it will be the dishonour of their Father; they would not answer them, but complain to God; this was then, and is still, the most effectual course to speed. When Nehemiah was to make request to a great king, he saith, then prayed I to the God of heaven.¶ It was an ejaculatory prayer, for he spoke it not, yet it was effectual; he thought if by prayer he could move the main wheel, all the rest would move. This is the way to set to work all second causes. Indeed we have no other means in prospect: let us betake ourselves to this spi-

* Psal. xxxiv. 15.

† Exod. xxxii. 10, 11.

‡ 1 Sam. vii. 3.

|| 2 Kings xix. 4.

§ 2 Chron. xxxii. 19, 20.

¶ Neh. ii. 4.

ritual armour, for prayers and tears are the church's weapons, Eph. vi. 18, 19, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication, in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints, and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel." This is our case, we beg our people's prayers for our restoration. Oh that ministers and people could strive (or be in an agony) together in their mutual prayers to God for each other!*

If you could pray more and better, we should come the sooner, and with a greater blessing, even in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ;† and for your encouragement to pray for us, we hope we can truly say as the Apostle, Heb. xiii. 18, "Pray for us, for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly." Though we suffer as evil doers, and are reproached as factious, seditious, and schismatical; as Paul was accounted an apostate and an enemy to the law; but we conduct ourselves as subjects, as ministers, living orderly in our places, giving none offence, so that none can challenge us in any thing save in the matters of our God, and in that they must excuse us, if we cannot in all things see with their eyes, nor swallow down such oaths and subscriptions as some dare whom we judge not, but are afraid of nothing so much as sin; and as for our preaching to you, though prohibited by men, we are under obligation to preach as our duty, for woe to us if we preach not the gospel. Zeal for God's glory, and love to your souls, expose us to all these censures and oppositions: it is for your sakes that we bear all these affronts, and will not you pray for us? Surely yourselves are concerned in our work; we are content to endure all for the gospel's

* Rom. xv. 30.

† Rom. xv. 29.

sake ; we ask nothing of you but your reception of our message and prayers for our persons ; we spend our time, and strength, and lungs for you, and will not you pray for us ? If God help us, will not this turn to your advantage ? Your prayers will return into your own bosoms. We have been serving almost three apprenticeships in our divorcement from public places and employments, yet our God hath not forsaken us, but secured our persons, and some liberties ; he hath delivered us, doth, and will deliver us, 2 Cor. i. 10—12, “ You also helping together in prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons, thanks may be given by many on our behalf ; for our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience,” &c. Having obtained help of God, we continue to this day at great uncertainties ; as Melancthon said,* so we may say, we have continued by divine bounty and care of us twenty years, and could never say assuredly, nor upon any probable grounds, that we should abide one week to an end : much of this may be ascribed to the effectual prayers of the church, as a means under God. Who can tell but in a short time your prayers may fetch us back again : howsoever, we are persuaded that these things shall turn to our and your salvation, through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, Phil. i. 19 : only see that your prayers be such as God will accept. I cannot enlarge on this point, but shall glance at the due qualifications of such a prayer as will undoubtedly prevail.

1. Your persons must be in covenant, John ix. 31.

2. You must exercise faith upon the mediator Christ, John xvi. 23.

* Ego jam sum hic, Dei beneficio, quadraginta annos, et nunquam potui dicere, aut certus esse, me per unam septimanam mansurum esse.—*Melch. Adam, vit. Melanct. p. 357.*

3. You must pray in the Holy Ghost, Jude, 20.
4. Ask what is according to God's will, 1 John v. 14.
5. Aim at God's glory as your main end, 1 Cor. x. 31.
6. Cast away all sin in heart and life, Psal. lxxvi. 18.
7. Live in the daily exercise of repentance, Heb. x. 22.
8. Maintain a holy awe of God in your hearts, Psal. ii. 11.
9. Set your hearts in order for the duty, Job. xi. 13.
10. Pray with understanding, minding the object, 1 Cor. xiv. 15.
11. With fervency and importunity, Luke xi. 8, 9.
12. Forgiving others that have offended you, Mark xi. 25.
13. Watching against temptations, Col. iv. 2.
14. Living up to your prayers, John xv. 7.
15. Maintaining communion with God, Luke ii. 37.
16. Coming with hopes to succeed, James i. 6.
17. Be sincere as to frames and intentions, Matt. vi. 5, 6.
18. Be daily sensible of wants and weaknesses, Matt. v. 6.
19. Wait patiently for returns of prayer, Psal. v. 3.
20. Be thankful for any incomes after prayer, Phil. iv. 6, 7.

Such dispositions as these you must have and bring into your exercises in the duty of prayer, and then you shall prevail for yourselves and others. This is the third general head.

CHAP. VI.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO PERSEVERANCE IN LAMENTING AFTER THE LORD.

IV. THE last thing at which I shall briefly aim, is to suggest some considerations which may serve as cordials to support and bear up our hearts till our souls find our dear Lord, or he turn again to us, in our lamentations after him.

1. Souls lamenting after the Lord are most likely to be the remnant who shall escape in approaching calamities : these have the mourner's mark on them, and ordinarily are left, Ezek. ix. 4, 6 ; and Ezek. vii. 16, " But they that escape of them shall escape, and shall be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them mourning every one for their iniquity." If land-destroying calamities come, you are likeliest to survive and be a holy seed, for storing the church in future times.

2. You may be the instruments to prevail with the Lord to keep in the midst of us : yet there is a possibility ; " Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him ? " Joel ii. v. 14. There is yet a may-be in it, Amos v. 15, " Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate ; it may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph." God hath condescended to hearken to his people's supplications, why not to yours ? The poor wise man hath delivered the city : * the innocent may deliver the island. † Lot succeeded for Zoar, Abraham for Lot, yea, very far for the cities of the plain. Make a trial ; and what com-

* Eccl. ix. 15.

† Job xxii. 30.

fort will it be to you, if your prayers in the tone of lamentation turn the scales for God's stay with us !

3. However, you may stay him with your own souls ; is that nothing ? God is as willing to be friendly with us, as we can be to desire it, and much more, Isa. xxvii. 5, "Or let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me ; and he shall make peace with me ;" and is this nothing ? Oh what is God's presence worth ? How have David, Job, Heman, and all the saints prized it ? Do you not want it ? "Follow on to know," and own and acknowledge, "the Lord, and you shall find his going forth is prepared as the morning, and he will come to you as the rain," Hos. vi. 3. Your fleece shall be wet when others are dry. If you cannot obtain mercy for others, yet as Noah, Daniel and Job, you may deliver your own souls by your righteousness.*

4. Yet the Lord hath not forsaken us ; he is still in the midst of us by his gracious providences and influences ; he hath been hitherto prevailed with, though he has threatened to leave us, and we had cause to fear the event ; his candlesticks are fixed, and candles are shining, though not all in their proper sockets, but under a bushel : this is an encouraging mercy, that our God hath not forsaken us. "Even now for a little space grace hath been shewed from the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage," Ezra ix. 8, 9. It was not our deservings that hath kept him with us ; no, no, "Israel hath not been forsaken, nor Judah of his God, though their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel," Jer. li. 5. What is the reason then that God is not quite gone ? See 1 Sam. xii. 22,

* Ezek. xiv. 14.

“The Lord will not forsake his people for his great name’s sake, because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people.” The argument holds for us, and it is still in force; blessed be God he hath not cast us off as yet, and the covenant with our ancestors still holds good, as in 2 Kings xiii. 23.

5. God seems to be in suspense whether he should leave us or not, to draw us on in our lamentings after him; just as he expresseth himself, Hos. xi. 8, “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim?” Strange language as spoken by the infinitely wise and immutable God; as though he were perplexed and knew not what to do. Surely this is spoken after the manner of men, and speaks God loth to punish, for indeed it is his strange work; as if he had said, the severity of my threats call on truth to carry them into execution, but how shall I prevail with myself to do it? * The glory of my name, my free grace, and constant love to my covenanted people, arrest my wrathful hand when ready to strike the fatal stroke—the righteousness of the judge saith, strike; the bowels of a father say, hold; and when God thus deliberates, it is to stay and see if his people will get hold of him, by faith and prayer; is not this his carriage towards us in his providence? certainly the Lord comes and goes as if he were loth to punish us, and is not this a very great encouragement to us to lament after him? Since he looks back as a mother to her child, with a wishful eye, as if he had not the power to go, as if he should say, call me back and you shall have my presence, my heart is towards you, though I am forced to turn my back on you,

* Sed quomodo hoc á me impetrabo?

you shall have me with you if you will lament evangelically after me.

6. You have good company in your exercise, though there be too, too many vile atheists and libertine wretches that say to God, "depart from us, cause the Holy One to cease from the midst of us;" yet there are mourners in Zion who are very importunately crying and lamenting after the Lord, with all their might seeking to fetch back the ark; though they be few comparatively, and though despised, and possibly hid in corners, and as little taken notice of as those seven thousand in Elijah's days, that had not bowed their knee to Baal.* But God searcheth out such retired worshippers, that pray, and complain to their Father in secret, and he will reward and answer them openly, with what concerns more than themselves. Oh! it is good to be of the number of these hidden ones! How blessed a thing is it to combine interests with this lovely society? There is a communion of saints in prayer, though unknown to one another. And I can say it, for your encouragement, O ye praying, mourning souls, that you are not alone, God hath thousands in these nations that have been hard at it many years, and present circumstances do quicken their cries. Our danger increaseth our pains, and those advance our cries; be not discouraged, you have many assistants. A threefold cord is not easily broken; God hath some children to cry after him from all parts of the kingdom, and though many of the old stock of weeping souls are worn out, yet some wrestling young ones are planted in their room, some begotten in the bonds of the gospel, for the word of God is not bound, though ambassadors be. Zion hath been built in this troublous

* 1 Kings xix. 18.

time. And I think it may be truly said, that as the ark hath more visible followers, so more sincere lamenters after it, than when it was taken out of its public station ; as Tertullian of old said, so it must be acknowledged that the more God's field is cut, the more grass springs up.

7. God hath a dear and tender regard for such as lament after him for the ark's sake, and will do them good upon that very account ; Psal. cxxii. 6, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, they shall prosper that love thee ;" they shall not only prosper and prevail for Jerusalem, but God will prosper them in other respects, in their graces, in comforts, yea oft in worldly concerns. A public spirit is a personal gainer ; God never suffers such to be losers by him, that deny themselves for him, Zeph. iii. 18, "I will gather them that are sorrowful, for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden." Such as study God's interest, have the Lord to study their interest. If we put our shoulder to bear his burden, he will bear both us and ours.* "Consider now," saith God, "from this day and upward from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider it, from this day will I bless you," Hag. ii. 18, 19. How much doth God value and how fully doth he reward an esteem for his worship ? God builds their houses that have but a good will to build his house ; as in David's case. Thus our Lord bids us prove him by our obedience and see if he will not open the windows of heaven, and pour down a blessing, Mal. iii. 10—12. Who would not then own and lay Zion's cause to heart ?

8. The ark and ordinances when lamented over in their absence will be the sweetest and most profitable

* Psalm lv. 22.

when returned and enjoyed. None will so gladly welcome the ark, and improve its return as they that most deeply laid to heart its removal. Such, like those who have appetites, will not come with indifference to this soul-refreshing food; a thirsty person will prize and be glad of a little water; David never so eagerly longed for God's presence and ordinances, as when he was in a dry and thirsty land, where no water was; Psal. lxiii. 1. "The full soul loaths the honey comb, but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet."* O what pantings! as the hart chased panteth for water brooks; you will gain more by a day's preaching then, than formerly in many days.

9. Souls that lament after the Lord shall enjoy him without medium or means at last. In heaven you will need no ordinances; Rev. xxi. 22, "I saw no temple therein, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb, are the temple of it;" for you shall see his face immediately, and no more through a glass darkly; yea you shall see him as he is,† which cannot but felicitate souls perfectly, therefore it is called the Beatifical Vision. O what a day will that be! You shall not then need to fear any disturbance from men or devils, but his servants shall serve him, and his name shall be on their foreheads; there is no more skulking into corners, nor meeting in the night for fear of men's laws, and persecution. Yea the more you have lamented after the Lord and his ark, the more shall you increase your joy in the Lord. The more your sorrows abound, the more will your comfort abound. The lower the ebb, the higher the tide. You that loved Jerusalem, shall be glad with her, yea, you shall rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourned for her, Isa. lxvi. 10

* Prov. xxvii. 7. Psal. xlii. 1.

† Rev. xxii. iv. 1 Cor. xiii. 12. 1 John iii. 2.

10. In the mean time God himself will supply the want of ordinances; the great God will be a little sanctuary when in want of other means of worship;* he himself will supply that defect. David could encourage himself in the Lord his God;† Habakkuk rejoiced in the Lord, when destitute of outward comfort, and even in the absence of external privileges.‡ What want you from ordinances, that the all-sufficient God cannot supply you with? light, love, warmth, strength, solution of doubts, satisfaction of your hearts; God is all in all, and all without all these helps. O friends! though you may not chuse to be without the means of grace, because they are God's instituted ways of conveying himself to us here, yet you must be content to be without them, when providence cuts you short of them, and say in this case as holy David, with which I shall conclude this subject, 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26, "Carry back the ark of God into the city, if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and show me both it and his habitation; but if he thus say, I have no delight in thee, behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him."

* Ezek. xi. 16.

† 1 Sam. xxx. 6.

‡ Hab. iii. 16—18.

JOB'S APPEAL;

BEING

A Funeral Sermon,

DELIVERED AT NORTHOWRAM, IN YORKSHIRE,

OCCASIONED BY THE

DEATH OF MR. JON. DENTON.



DEDICATED TO MR. JOHN DENTON, SOUTHWARK,
NEAR LONDON.

JOB'S APPEAL.

JOB X. 7.

*Thou knowest that I am not wicked, and there is none that
can deliver out of thine hand.*

THIS text contains the sum of the grand controversy between afflicted Job and his censuring friends, who would prove Job to be a wicked man. The devil and Job's friends speak the same language; only Satan presumes upon it, that if God will touch Job's flesh he will curse him to his face. His friends uncharitably accuse him as one that *had* cursed God, or committed some scandalous sin, and therefore God did so severely touch his flesh. Against this charge Job makes his appeal to the heart-searching God, and saith, "thou knowest that I am not wicked."

The latter part of the text implies, first, A concession. I may notwithstanding all my integrity be in God's hand, that is, in the correcting hand of God : and secondly, contains an assertion, "none can deliver out of thine hand;" as if he had said, I may continue long under it, and no power in heaven or earth can rescue me, except God himself set me at liberty. A word may be introduced relative to the former, though the latter be the subject assigned me. "Thou knowest:" the words are very emphatical, and signify, it is in thy knowledge that I am not wicked; as if he had said, thou hast not this knowledge from without, from reports or hearsay; no,

thy knowledge is from thyself; it is internal, immediate, and therefore perfect and infallible.

God exactly knows every man's state and frame; his knowledge is not consequent but concomitant; "all things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do;" God's line soundeth man's depth; our persons and actions are manifest to him now, and shall be laid open before angels and men in the great day.

"Thou knowest that I am not wicked:" he saith not, that I am not a sinner: alas, there is too much sin in me. "Sin," (saith an interpreter,) "remains in the regenerate, yet they cannot, or ought not to be called wicked; God gives the denomination from the better part. The best saints are indeed sinners, yet the worst saints are not wicked; they are sinners by remaining corruption, but are godly by renovation." The word here, corresponds with that in Psal. xviii. 21, where David says, "I have not wickedly departed from my God," that is, by a course of sinning. The phrase also imports being condemned and cast at God's bar, as a wicked man, Ps. cix. 7, "When he is judged let him be condemned;" let him go forth as a condemned malefactor; I dare appeal to the all-wise, heart-searching God, that I am not such a one.

Doct. That a truly gracious soul dare appeal to God that he is not wicked.

The child of God makes him witness of his integrity: at the time when enemies scorn, Satan accuseth, conscience upbraids, and God keeps at a distance, the devout soul can say, "Behold my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high."

It may seem a paradox, but is a great truth, that the holiest saint on earth dares not justify himself before God, yet he dare stand before God to justify his

integrity. This must be understood in an evangelical and not in a legal sense; through Christ the mediator, and not as in the believer; according to the covenant of grace, and not that of works. A great divine saith, "the gospel covenant laxeth the rigour of the law, which calleth for complete obedience, by resolving all into sincerity and truth. When we go upon the trial for our life before Christ's bar, the great inquest will be whether we have been sincere or not;" he does not mean that sincerity is set up in Christ's room, but as it is an evidence of our interest in him: hence Job saith, chap. xxxi. 6, "Let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know my integrity." He means a gospel balance, for "by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." He does not mean that God must weigh him before he can know him, but he speaks after the manner of men. Thus David also, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me," Psal. cxxxix. 23, 24. There is too much wickedness in my depraved heart God knows, but I dare appeal to thee, that there is no way of wickedness, no ordinary road, nor any uninterrupted path of sin in me. Sin doth not make a thoroughfare in my soul, I give it many a turn, and dare appeal to thee that I would gladly be rid of it.

All I shall do on this point, is to propose and answer this weighty case of conscience:—How may a Christian make it out in his appeal to God that he is not wicked? I confess this is a great question, and hard to be resolved, but I shall follow the scripture line, in representing the pious soul's appeal to God.

1. Lord thou knowest that I am not as I have been, that there is a great change wrought in my heart and life. A turn I have had—thou knowest whether it be

saving or not, whether it be from the power of Satan unto God; but this I can say, such a one I was, but am not, I am put into a new frame, and thou knowest whether I am made a new creature or not; the stream of my affections runs in another channel, thou knowest whether it be the channel of grace and heaven-wards.

2. Thou knowest I have made a solemn covenant with thyself; thou knowest the time, place, manner, inducements, ends, and witness thereof. I studied the nature of this covenant, and felt the pulse of my soul, whether I was cordial in it or not, and thought I chose thee as my chief good and utmost end, and gave up myself entirely to thee, when there was no witness besides thee and my own conscience. Thou knowest whether I had any reserves or evasions, in this solemn transaction. I have given thee the keys of my heart, and am glad of such a guest and Lord.

3. Lord, thou knowest I do not regard iniquity in my heart, and cannot look pleasantly upon it. There is in me a secret dislike of every sin, not only as soul-damning, but as God-dishonouring. I hate every false way as contrary to the law of God; yea, methinks I find an antipathy to it as contrary to my new nature; for though suited to my carnal palate, yet grace raiseth my heart against it, for the intrinsic evil in it as well as the consequences of it; I hate it though delectable and profitable, yea, I abhor what is evil, even the garment spotted by the flesh.

4. Lord, thou knowest I do daily resolve and pray against sin, all sin of heart and life; thyself art privy to my earnest supplications that I may not be led into temptation, nor left under the power of it. Lord, do thou set a watch before my mouth; let not my heart incline to any evil thing; God forbid I should do this wickedness and sin against him; I am purposed that

my mouth, hand, or foot shall not transgress. God hath heard my prayers, and known my vows against particular lusts to which I have been addicted, and I hope I can say as David: "I was also upright before him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity;" so that it prevails not over me.

5. Lord, thou knowest I am daily seeking not only to lop off the branches, but to stub up the roots of sin, to weaken and mortify the body of death, and to crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts. It is not enough to cease from the acts, but my soul would enfeeble the habits of sin. O that the old man were crucified with Christ, that the body of sin may be destroyed! The sure conquest is only obtained through Christ's death and resurrection, and I find it is nothing but the law of life in Christ Jesus that makes me free from the law of sin and death: he only came to destroy the works of the devil.

6. Lord, thou knowest I set myself against secret and spiritual sins; "cleanse thou me from secret faults." I am afraid of pride, hard-heartedness, hypocrisy, vanity, formality, and all spiritual as well as fleshly wickedness. Now I understand by thy holy law that the least motions of sin in my heart are evil and deserve death. Thou knowest whether I make not conscience of suppressing those sins which others make no reckoning of, even vain thoughts and risings of depravity.

7. Lord, thou knowest the conflicts and combats betwixt flesh and spirit; the flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh: methinks I find within me as it were the company of two armies; my corruption is not on the throne but in the field; sin hath not dominion over me, for I am daily warring, and though I am oft foiled by it, yet fall on again. Sin is not a king but a tyrant in me; I go daily armed

into the field and must fight under the banner of my dear Lord, and shall be a conqueror.

8. Lord, thou knowest these sins break my heart as they break out within me; they lie as a heavy load on my conscience, and make me weary and heavy laden. How oft do I cry, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?" Thou knowest the tears and groans my sin hath cost me. "Lord, all my desire is before thee, and my groaning is not hid from thee." One sin hath cost me more than all my other troubles; Oh my broken bones!

9. Lord, thou knowest that I love not the company of wicked men, I bid them oft depart from me, not from ostentation, but for fear of infection; for I would not be found with the wicked when my Lord calls: "I have not sat with vain persons; I have hated the congregation of evil doers." I have often experienced either grief or guilt in a needless association with wicked men, and I hope thou wilt not rank me with the wicked whom I love not.

10. Lord, thou knowest I love the society of thy saints and servants; I am a companion of all them that fear thee, I account them the excellent of the earth, in whom is all my delight. I am sure wicked men love not thy children, and those are passed from death unto life that love the brethren. I love them because they are like thee my heavenly Father, and bear thine image though they be poor in the world, and may differ from me in some things, yet my heart is towards them, and I take a pleasure in having communion with them in God's worship and Christian converse.

11. Lord, I love to be admonished of my faults, and love them better that are faithful to reprove me for my sins; I can truly say, I love my minister better for his plain dealing, and the word of God for its purity:

“Lord make me to know my transgressions and my sins.” I love not palliating, but would have my wound searched to the bottom that it may be safely cured. “If the righteous smite me it shall be a kindness;” yea, even Ishmael’s railing shall do me good, by a solemn reflecting on my faults.

12. Lord, thou knowest whether my soul doth not love thee and thy Son Jesus Christ. Thou hast said that to them that believe he is precious. I have often been feeling the pulse of my soul, and dare appeal to thee with Peter, “Lord thou knowest that I love thee:” thyself shalt vouch for me and make the affidavit: thou shalt not have this attestation at my hand, but upon thine own knowledge. Thou art the chief among ten thousand; yea doubtless, I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ.

13. Lord, thou knowest what a poor sorry thing I account the world to be and all its glory; I esteem the pleasures, profits and honours of the world as a pageantry. I have made Moses’s choice, to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than choose the pleasures of sin, the honours and offices of Pharaoh’s court. I can look through the best of the world and turn my back upon it, as an empty, insignificant thing, though the men of the world are content with it for their portion.

14. Lord, thou knowest the way that I take, and the earnest desire and design of my soul to walk in thy ways, to have respect to all thy commandments, and to attend on all thine ordinances. I miss it in all but dare balk none; my aim is, to fulfil all God’s will, to stand complete in all the will of God. There is no flesh-displeasing duty, no self-denying act but I attempt it. If God say, do it; I will not consult flesh and blood, but my language is, as thou hast said so must I do; my

foot standeth in an even place, and lies square to God's will, at all times, in all places and conditions.

15. Lord, thou knowest I do my best in every religious exercise: God forbid, I should offer to the Lord that which costs me nothing. I must love the Lord with all my soul, mind, and strength: and God forbid that I should do his work negligently, or offer to him a corrupt thing. O that I could be more fervent in spirit in serving the Lord. God deserves more, and my best is infinitely below him. O that I could do more! but, alas! I am short in all.

16. Lord, thou knowest my design in all I do is for thy glory and the enjoyment of thee. I dare not look both at thee and myself; then I lose myself in my natural, civil, and spiritual acts; all the lines must and shall bend this way, that "God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ." My design is to live to the Lord, and to die to the Lord, that Christ may be magnified in my body, by life or death. O that I could enjoy communion with thee in every duty and ordinance! thou knowest this is my heaven.

17. Lord, thou knowest all my dependance is upon thy Majesty, both for assistance and acceptance: I must lean on my beloved, and by the grace of God I am what I am. I cannot think a good thought without fresh supplies of grace; but I am able to do all things through the strength of Christ, and can run in the way of God's commandments when he enlarges my heart. I lay all upon thy golden altar to be accepted in the Beloved.

18. Lord, thou knowest I am daily pressing towards perfection, for I have not yet attained what I would gladly reach: I would be mending what is amiss, and be soaring to a higher-pitch of grace, perfecting holi-

noss in the fear of God ; increasing with all the increase of God till I come to a perfect man. Alas, how much do I yet want of perfection ! I would still be singing the song of degrees, and going from strength to strength till I appear before God in Zion.

19. Lord, thou knowest how much I am concerned for thy church, which gives me some ground to hope I am a lively member in that mystical body : “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.” It raiseth my heart to see the gospel propagated, sinners converted, saints edified, and united : and it runs to my heart to see Christ’s interest laid low, the preaching of the gospel obstructed, few converts, scandals breaking out, and contentions breaking in : then I say, “Woe is me ! the good man is perished out of the earth.” When wickedness abounds, and love decays,* I make that lamentation, Isa. lix. 11—15.

20. Lord, thou knowest notwithstanding all this, what a mean opinion I have of myself and my poor doings :† alas, my doings are but dregs and rags ! I am still an unprofitable servant, I despair of myself and abhor myself in dust and ashes : I am vile in mine own eyes. God may justly condemn me notwithstanding all I have done, yea, and for all I have done, for if the Lord mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand ? I fly to my advocate Jesus Christ, and desire the New Testament Aaron to take away the iniquity of my holy things.

I shall subjoin a few words of *application*.—1. For instruction. If God’s children thus appeal, then,

(1.) Others do not know their hearts, for God’s children do not appeal to men but God. No man knows another’s heart, and should not pretend to it. Dost thou say : “it is a wild, groundless censure, from such as

* Terras Astrea reliquit. † Horreo quicquid de meo est.

carry fair, but whose hearts are bad?" How knowest thou? Dost thou usurp God's throne? The best men have been deceived with the professions of others; as the church on earth with Simon Magus, Acts viii. 13, 23.* The church judgeth of overt acts, not secret thoughts.

(2.) The most observant persons have much ado to know their own hearts, and are glad to appeal to God. The prophet saith, who knows it? It is a deep fathomless pit. Hazael said, "Is thy servant a dog, that I should do such a thing?" Peter was confident he should never deny his Master, but both failed. The inward thought of every one is deep, and the heart gives deceitful answers like the heathen oracles. He that trusteth to his own heart is a fool, for it will certainly deceive him.

(3.) Yet it is possible men may know their spiritual state God-wards, or else Job would not have appealed to God. The expression speaks some confidence:† Job doth not doubt, but assert his integrity; yea he saith "My righteousness I hold fast and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me as long as I live," Job xxvii. 6. It is possible men may know whether they be in a state of grace or not, for God hath given conscience for this end. "The spirit of a man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly," Prov. xx. 27. If men were faithful and would light their candle at the word of God and make diligent search they might know more.

(4.) The whole world is distributed into two sorts of persons, the godly and the wicked. "Two loves," saith St. Augustine, "built two cities; the love of God built mount Zion, and worldly love built Babylon: and

* De secretis non judicat Ecclesia.

† Vox non dubitantis sed asserentis.

the whole race of mankind are inhabitants of these two cities." Though carnal men do not believe this, and think men differ only partially and not specifically, some worse and others better, not in kind; yet a time is coming, "when men shall discern betwixt the righteous and the wicked, betwixt him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not: for the sheep shall be set on the right hand, and the goats on the left, and receive their different sentences from the impartial judge of the world. At this day discriminating grace makes a difference, and discriminating preaching shows a difference among men: for ministers must teach the people the difference betwixt the holy and profane, and divide the word of God aright, for it is a discerners of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Men may see a vast difference, if they are not wilfully or judicially blind.

2. Another use is, of admonition,

(1.) To all sorts of persons, to be and behave themselves as those who may make their appeal to God. Oh that all Christians could say as the church of old: "all this is come upon us, yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant.— Shall not God search this out, for he knoweth the secrets of the heart?" Psal. xlv. 17 and 21. O friends, on what side are you? God knows, and it is fit you should know. "I know my sheep, and am known of mine." "He needed not that any should testify of men; for he knew what was in man," John x. 14, and ii. 25. Look to it, if you be of a holy and pious character, God will own you as his: if not, be sure your sin will find you out. Ask yourselves, what am I? a sheep or a goat? Whose am I? God's servant or the devil's slave? What am I doing? God's work or the devil's drudgery? Whither am I going, to heaven or hell? What say you to the various appeals we have

mentioned? Will your hearts ingenuously echo to them? If you say yes; compare your hearts with scripture and go on safe grounds: if not, tremble under the sentence of condemnation. Be strict in this case, for you must be tried another day.

(2.) If you find you are wicked, then woe to you, whether you be openly profane or secret hypocrites: "The light of the wicked shall be put out: a hypocrite shall not come before God: the ungodly shall not stand in judgment, for the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish. The wicked must be silent in darkness and turned into hell. He will rain upon them snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest." Upon your doors you may have written, Lord, have mercy upon us, but God will not own you nor hear your prayer, but say to the wicked: "What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant into thy mouth?" Psal. l. 16. All you do is sinful, whether called natural, civil, or religious acts. The very ploughing of the wicked is sin; their sacrifice or prayer is an abomination to the Lord. It will be bitterness to them in the end. "Say ye to the wicked, it shall be ill with him." The longer you live, the more mischief you do and the more misery you heap up to fit you for destruction. Therefore bethink yourselves, repent, and forsake your ways and thoughts, that God may have mercy on you.

3. A further use concerns God's children especially by way of comfort. You that dare and do thus appeal to God in sincerity, whose hearts do not upbraid you, thank God for it: this very appeal is a good evidence of your sincerity, and will fortify you against the censures of men. God knows you better than men, and will clear you when men condemn you. How often doth David

cheer up himself with this? Your names may be under a cloud for a season, but "God will bring forth your righteousness as the light," Psal. xxxvii. 6. Thus he did with holy Job. It will fortify you against Satan's sore temptations. When he accuseth you to God you may say, "the Lord rebuke thee, O Satan." When he accuseth you to yourselves, and conscience condemns, God is greater than your hearts and will supersede all pleas. In the hour of sad desertion, when God hides his face or withdraws his grace, this will cheer you, that you can go to God and say, I am not wicked. Let God carry himself as he pleaseth to me, his favours are his own, he doeth me no wrong, I will cling to him still: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." If he carry himself strangely towards me, yet he is good and worthy to be followed in the dark, and I will stay myself on him. In a dying hour it will be a blessed reflection, to say, with good Hezekiah under sentence of death: "Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight," Isa. xxxviii. 3. Happy soul! that can look death in the face, and with confidence approach the tremendous tribunal under the comfortable sense of this upright and scriptural appeal.

Yet take a caution or two.

(1.) Beware of ostentation. Pride not yourselves in your integrity, for this is contrary to the nature and ends of this appeal. "If I justify myself my own mouth shall condemn me." Alas! I am far from perfection: "I am vile what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth, and repent in dust and ashes."

(2.) The Lord Jesus is to be our surety and answer for us. "Where is boasting? It is excluded. By

what law? of works? nay, but by the law of faith." Rom. iii. 27. The language of the gospel is, "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory," Isa. xlv. 25.

Thus I have dispatched the former part of my text; I proceed to the latter—"There is none that can deliver out of thine hand." What, none? then our condition is as bad as fallen angels'. But none, here, must refer to mere creatures, for Jesus Christ can deliver out of the hands of justice, from present wrath, and from wrath to come. The hand of God, denotes the power of God. Deliverance is either temporal, spiritual, or eternal, and which way soever it may be taken it affords this *doctrine*:—That no means on earth can rescue a person out of the hands of the infinite God. In opening this doctrine, I shall,

First, show the meaning of the words. Interpreters take them in a twofold sense, some as (*vox dolentis*) the language of Job's sorrow, moving God's bowels of compassion, as if Job should say, why Lord dost thou deal thus severely with me? Who can rescue me when thou dost arrest? Thou mayest keep me under restraint for ever, and take time enough to punish me, thou needest not put me upon such a painful rack as though I were in danger to be rescued or escape thy hands; as princes fearing the rescue of a prisoner, send forth a writ of execution to dispatch him. The tormented prisoner that desired a dispatch from his misery by death was answered by the tyrant,* I am not so far friends with thee. It may be this text is parallel to chapter vii. where Job would be glad to be quit of his pain; but, saith he, I cannot till God's time; yet Lord, pity me, smite me not both sharply and long.

Some make it sound as (*vox profitentis*) Job's heroic

* Nondum tecum in gratiam redeo.

and magnanimous profession and stout resolution to adhere to God and duty, though he were kept under God's hand all his days! as if he had said, I have appealed to thee that I am not wicked, and I hope hitherto my integrity hath appeared, and, by thy grace assisting me, shall further appear, though none should deliver me out of thy hand: I humbly hope thou wilt find me holding mine integrity as long as life: do what thou wilt with me I will honour thee. I hope to prove the devil a liar, who said, I would curse thee to thy face: hitherto he has been mistaken, and I hope will be by the grace of God assisting me. If I never be delivered, God shall not be blasphemed; I will for ever have good thoughts of him, whatever he may do with me; if I cannot be delivered, or satisfied about God's proceedings, yet God shall be justified. Both these senses are proper enough, and we may take it either way.

Secondly, what is it to be in God's hand? God's hand in scripture implies several things.

1. His eternal purpose and design, Acts iv. 28, "For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done." This cannot be altered, for the counsel of the Lord shall stand for ever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations. This is a truth, but not pertinent here.

2. God's supreme, actual power extended and put forth to do good, expressed by putting forth his hand to heal. When God will help and heal, the devil cannot pluck the patient out of God's hand. But neither is this the proper sense here.

3. By God's hand is meant his provision for his creatures, Psal. civ. 28, "Thou openest thy hand, and they are filled with good." Indeed none can starve those that God will supply; in the days of famine they

shall be satisfied. Yet this is not the meaning of the text.

4. God's disposing and ordering providence is expressed by his hand, Psal. xxxi. 15, "My times are in thy hand." No one can lengthen or shorten my days but thyself: man's days are appointed, and God appoints their bounds. I think Job does not mean this directly here.

5. By God's hand is meant sometimes, divine assistance, Psal. lxxiv. 11, "Why withdrawest thou thy hand, even thy right hand?" this means protection or help. And again, "Let thy hand be with the man of thy right hand." Indeed none can hinder or weaken if God strengthens. Yet this is not the sense.

6. By hand, is meant God's special love and favour. Luke i. 66, "The hand of the Lord was with him." Meaning some peculiar indulgence and visible token of God's respect for him. This is a mercy that none can deprive saints of. Yet this is not meant.

7. The operation of the Holy Spirit. Ezek. i. 3, "The hand of the Lord was there upon him." Whether this means the extraordinary or ordinary motions of the Holy Spirit, there is none that can hinder or obstruct them. This is a truth, but not the truth in the passage before us.

8. By God's hand is meant, any providential dispensation whether good or bad. "Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and not evil," Job ii. 10. This is God's prerogative only; he kills and makes alive. This idea may be included in the text, but this is not all.

9. Yet more particularly, by the hand of God is meant, the hand of affliction. Thus David saith, "Thy hand presseth me sore," Psal. xxxviii. 2. Whether inward or outward affliction be supposed; as when

Job saith, "Have pity upon me, O ye my friends, for the hand of God hath touched me."

10. By the hand of God, is meant death. To God belong the issues from death. If he kill, who is he that can preserve alive, or raise from the grave? "I kill, and I make alive, I wound, and I heal, neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand." This last meaning, and that concerning affliction, I take to be what is meant by the hand of God in my text. Where are the men or things that can secure us from death or trouble? What power or policy can prevent or remove by force or cunning, the hand of God when he thinks good to lay it upon us? Suppose God take away estate, friends, relations, health, peace, liberty, or life, who can forbid him? If God stops the breath, who can hold it? The whole world must yield before him.

Thirdly, Who, or what in men's opinion, is judged most likely to deliver persons out of the hand of God?

1. Men expect that their riches, and honours, or great friends should deliver them; like that wretched prelate who cried out when dying, "Will money do nothing? Will my prince's favour avail nothing? Must I die, who can command the greatest part of the kingdom?" No, no, riches profit nothing in the day of wrath. "None can by any means redeem his brother, or give a ransom for him." Men are mistaken if they think to purchase a reprieve or exemption from death, or any other trouble. Here money bears no mastery; a golden key will not open God's prison door, and no bribe can be admitted in this case to preserve us from the stroke of justice. Alas! if God take men away with his stroke, then a great ransom cannot deliver them. God will not esteem men's riches.

2. Some have great confidence in an arm of flesh;

they think natural health, vigour, or fortitude will stand them in stead: but, alas, what becomes of the most vigorous spirits and constitutions? Where is Xerxes' army of a million men with all their fortitude and magnanimity? "No man hath power over the spirit, to retain it; there is no discharge in that war," Eccl. viii. 8. Forces of strength cannot withstand assaults from heaven, any more than men can prevent drops of rain from falling. Where is the doughty champion that can meet in arms with Jehovah? Who hath hardened himself against God and prospered? Are men, yea all men, stronger than God? "When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?" And on the contrary, he will recompense whether men choose or refuse: "There is none that can deliver out of my hand," saith God, "I will work, and who shall let it." All attempts are vain to prevent an evil, be it public or personal, whether it relate to soul or body.

3. Men make great reckoning of wit, parts, learning, or politic stratagems. Men dig deep to hide their counsels from the Lord, but "God disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise." The most learned physicians cannot find out an antidote against the approach of sickness or death. If men say, we will do thus, yet if God say, it shall not stand, it tumbles down as a Babel of men's inventions: he saith, take counsel together, but it shall come to nought. A whole college of physicians with all their art and learning cannot cure so much as a rheumatic pain, yea the most contemptible disease shall be a door to let in death, if God opens it, for he alone keeps the key. With small circumstances the great God can, and often does, confound the heads of the wisest politicians, and make their counsels of none effect; "For there is no wisdom, nor understand-

ing, nor counsel against the Lord." Cæsar Borgias little thought of his own sickness and death, when he laid the design of managing all things to his own advantage after his father's death. "Man knoweth not that which shall be."

4. There is one thing which is most likely to deliver out of the hand of God, that is, true religion. "Righteousness delivereth from death," in two respects:—by the prayers and piety of others; "He shall deliver the island of the innocent, and it is delivered by the pureness of thy hands," Job xxii. 30. The poor wise man by his wisdom delivered the city. God would have spared Sodom for ten righteous persons in it: and he saith of Jerusalem, "Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth: and I will pardon it," Jer. v. 1. Moses prevailed for all Israel consisting of an army of six hundred thousand men. Surely then such interposition will deliver out of the hand of God; no, sometimes it will not: "though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be towards this people; cast them out of my sight," Jer. xv. 1. "Yea though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it; they should but deliver their own souls by their righteousness." If all the holy men on earth should interpose for one man, they could not deliver him in some cases. A man's personal holiness, piety, and prayers cannot deliver him out of God's hands, especially in case of temporal calamities; neither Moses nor Aaron could prevail to go into Canaan. Some make this to be the sense of my text; it is not my own integrity that can free me from the stroke of God's hand; though I am not wicked, yet I am not exempt from affliction.

All things come alike to all, and the best men may be the most afflicted: "Waters of a full cup are wrung out to them, they are chastened every morning." It is no sign of God's hatred, but rather of his love, to correct his dearest children; yea, to strike them with death. It is true, righteousness delivereth from spiritual and eternal death, but not natural; "Moses my servant is dead." "Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?" We must needs die; it is the royal statute of heaven. Men's holiness and believing prayers cannot secure them from this stroke, as daily experience testifies.

Fourthly, The reasons whence it is, that none can deliver out of the hands of God.

1. God's sovereignty and man's subjection. His kingdom ruleth over all, he is supreme Lord and Lawgiver of the vast universe; celestial, terrestrial, and even infernal creatures are under his command and control. God put the greatest monarch on earth seven years apprentice to the beasts of the field, to learn this great lesson of the Almighty's sovereignty; "All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: none can say unto him, what doest thou?" Dan. iv. 35. Things must be as God orders them.

2. God's power and man's weakness. God is Almighty: this is his essential property whereby he can do all things. He created the world, hangeth the earth upon nothing, and will burn it at the last day. He upholds all things by the word of his power, and can dissolve all in an instant: who then is able to stand before him? "Behold the nations are as the drop of a bucket; yea, all nations before him are as nothing, yea, less than nothing and vanity," Isa. xl. 15, 17. Who then can resist him?

3. The holiness of God and sinfulness of man. He

is glorious in holiness. "The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works," Psal. cxlv. 17. Never could any of the sons of Adam challenge him for an irregular act, from the beginning of the world to this day. All that have known God have vindicated him, and condemned themselves; for God is righteous, and man is punished for his sins. As sinners cannot rescue out of God's hand; so, if they judged aright they would not attempt to deliver themselves, but say as David, "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me," Psalm cxix. 75.

4. The wisdom of God and man's foolishness. Alas, what would man do with himself if he were able to rescue himself out of God's hand? Cannot God dispose of him, better than he can of himself? Is not his understanding infinite? Cannot God extract a medicine out of a cup of poison, and make the worst things work the greatest good for his children? God is good to all, abundant in goodness and truth, and "he doeth good to them that be good;" yea, he doth good by the most unlikely means; he chastens his people that he may "humble them, prove them, and do them good in the latter end." It would be madness then, for foolish man to desire a deliverance out of the hands of such a God, whose works are wrought in number, weight, and measure, and who disposeth all things for the best.

Use first, Of instruction to inform us,

1. That there is a God, in opposition to atheists who say in their hearts, there is no God; yea, some say it with their tongues, but too many in their lives. That was a proud Pharaoh who said, "Who is the Lord? I know not the Lord that I should let Israel go: I will not let Israel go." But God made him know his power and justice before he had done with

him; even the stoutest devils in hell feel his hand, and cannot but believe that there is a God, and that none can deliver them out of his hand: there are no atheists in hell, whatever there may be on earth.

2. God alone is an absolute sovereign over the whole universe, who uncontrollably rules the world, and hath a chain with which he binds men and devils. Men may contradict his commanding will, but cannot contradict his disposing and punishing will; "Who would not fear thee, O King of nations?" God works immediately or mediately, and when he useth means it is not for want of power in him, but in his goodness to us to communicate dignity to the creatures in their instrumentality; for there is no restraint to the Lord, to save by many or by few, by any instruments or none at all.

3. It is wonderful condescension that the great God will concern himself about sorry man, who humbleth himself to behold things in heaven and in the earth. "What is man that thou shouldst magnify him, and that thou shouldst set thine heart upon him," Job vii.

17. It is an act of God's care and faithfulness when he takes pains to scourge rather than forsake us; we are indebted to him for a rod of love, but much more for deliverance out of affliction, and advancing us by his right hand. It was this made David twice break out into the exclamation, "What is man that thou art mindful of him, and takest knowledge of him?"

4. Adore the infinite grace of God in Christ, in the blessed contrivance of the gospel. Men had sold themselves to sin and Satan, but Jesus Christ came to deliver those forlorn captives, by price and by power, by the price of his blood, and power of his Spirit. He delivers souls from the wrath to come, he is mighty, he led captivity captive at his ascension; in his lowest state of

humiliation on the cross, he spoiled principalities and powers, made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it. All the devils in hell cannot keep a poor child of divine love, whom God will set at liberty ; none can deliver out of his hands but Christ. O admire this redeeming love of God, which brings along with it both temporal blessings and spiritual deliverance. "This man shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land," Micah v. 5.

Use second, Of conviction.

1. As to public affairs both in church and state. If God deliver us over into the hands of our enemies, though they be but wounded men, they shall prevail. If men refuse to drink of this cup, yet the Lord saith, "Ye shall certainly drink." Valiant armies, numerous forces, and high fortifications cannot secure us from inundations of divine wrath, when God puts a people to shame and silence for their sin. We may please ourselves with power and policy, but they are insignificant things against divine vengeance. There is a season when a nation's iniquity is full, then they will be destroyed and none can deliver. When the ephah is full, the talent of lead is put on the mouth, and the wings carry it into its proper place of irrevocable destruction. When iniquity abounds, love decays ; when there are few intercessions, much confidence in an arm of flesh, and great ingratitude for former deliverances, God may justly say, "I will deliver you no more ;" and we may have apprehensions and fears.

2. As to particular persons. Let careless sinners tremble. Consider, O poor sinner, who forgettest God, "lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." There are the following considerations that lock the sinner under divine wrath :—

Adam's sin left you prisoners in the hand of justice. By nature you are children of wrath. Every act of sin sinks you deeper, and binds you faster in this low dungeon; for the wages of sin is death. Satan like a jailor is dragging you to sin, and will execute sentence of death at last. The righteous law of God also confirms the sentence; for we are shut up, and kept prisoners under the law. Hell is the jail in which the prisoners will be kept till they have paid the utmost farthing. Death will open the door for a sinner's admission into this woful state, and shut the door of hope. Souls in that state are reserved together with devils in chains of darkness, against the judgment of the great day. Sinners may be cast into this miserable dungeon unawares, and die with a lie in their right hand. None but Christ can deliver any out of the hands of justice, and translate them into glorious liberty. None will be finally redeemed by Christ, but such as are sanctified and purified for himself, as a peculiar people zealous of good works. O then, if all this be true, what will become of poor graceless and Christless souls. Heaven is shut against you, hell is gaping for you, and if once damned, damned for ever, for there is a great gulf fixed, and there is no escaping from the infernal lake. O that sinners in Zion were afraid, that fearfulness would surprise the hypocrites, that they may be prevented from falling into this devouring fire, these everlasting burnings. Lord, open their eyes, and turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and eternal inheritance.

Use third, Of admonition.

1. To sinners. Examine your state, and consider in whose hands you are, either of God or the devil, of mercy or justice. Lord, open the eyes of these men that

they see; the discovery of danger is a step towards a remedy. Poor sinner, thou art in invisible chains, and Satan holds his black hand over thine eyes; "Awake thou that sleepest and Christ shall give thee light." Observe the Spirit's operations. When a light shines into the prison, observe if the angel of the Lord do not smite thee on thy sides and raise thee up; then follow him, and thy chains will fall off. Who can tell, but if thou wilt own the next gracious influence, it may set thee a step nearer to God? "Quench not the Spirit," comply with divine calls, put your hand into God's, and he will bring you towards himself. Renounce all sin. The throne of iniquity hath no fellowship with God. "Wash you, make you clean, put away your doings out of his sight," and then come near to God, you shall become acquainted and be familiar with him, and shall be secured in the hollow of his hand. You cannot serve two masters. Give up yourselves to the Lord, first your souls, then your bodies, as instruments of righteousness. You cannot expect that God will take you into his hands till you have put yourselves there. David saith, "Into thy hand I commend my spirit." The apostle Peter enjoins it, "Let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as to a faithful Creator."

2. To saints.

(1.) To such as are under God's hand. If you see not how you can be delivered, do not despond. Say not as David, "I shall one day perish." Put on patience, and let it have its perfect work, and look through the thick cloud. After darkness comes light.* Own God's hand in your affliction, and lay it not on instruments. Job said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken

* *Post tenebras spero lucem.*

away." Thus justify God in all, for it is fit it should be so. Desire rather that affliction may be sanctified, than removed: pray more to be fitted for deliverance than released from the trouble: underrate not your mercies; get faster hold of God by faith and prayer: say as Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Still own him as a Father, and he will own you as a child; thus glorify God in the fire.

(2.) To you that have been delivered, I may say, give God the praise of your deliverance: return back to give thanks. Love God more for himself. Benefits may be inducements, but God himself is the only adequate object of your dearest affections: David twice professed his strong love after he had been in affliction. Tell others what God hath done for you, in suitable language and behaviour: let your lives be walking bibles, and live as persons raised from the dead. Long to be with God in heaven, not so much to be totally free from the Lord's hand of affliction, as to be in his bosom by immediate communion.

Use fourth, Of consolation to God's children.

Though God's hand be heavy upon you and none can deliver you from it, yet he is a Father still; though perhaps offended, yet he is not a sin-avenging judge: this latter case would be dreadful, but the former eligible. Compare 2 Sam. xxiv. 14, with Heb. x. 31. His scourging as a father is a branch of the gospel covenant. As none can deliver you out of God's correcting hand, so none can pluck you out of his fatherly hand: our Lord Jesus testifies both of himself and his Father, who is greater than all. While you are in his hand he never looks off from you, you are engraven on the palms of his hands, and he takes special care of you in his providence. Remember if you are never delivered out of God's hand of affliction, death will set you at liberty.

There are two choice cordials, 1 Cor. x. 13, to assure you, that you shall be enabled to bear your affliction, and that in due time you shall have a way to escape.

To conclude. Let the children of God be animated and encouraged in their sufferings from God and for God. Though they may be sharp and long, and no human help can avail to rescue you, God can and will, and you may say as the three children in Dan. iii. 17, "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king." The Lord will deliver you by his hand of mercy, out of the hand of justice, yea, from the evil work of sin in the soul, and will preserve you unto his heavenly kingdom. Study the promises, reflect on experience, live by faith, be much in prayer, sanctify God's name, and learn obedience by what you suffer under God's hand, and you will find all things work together for your good, though you cannot discern it at present. Happy souls! who trust in God and live by faith in evil times.

*Est Deus in cælo, qui pollens omnia curat,
Credentes nusquam deservisse potest.*

There is a God in heaven, who will not leave
Such souls on earth, as to him ever cleave.

END OF VOL. III.