

THE
SURE MERCIES OF DAVID ;
OR,
SECOND PART
OF
Heart Treasure.

PREFACE

TO "THE SURE MERCIES OF DAVID."

TO ALL THE HEIRS OF PROMISE, THE SAINTS OF THE MOST HIGH GOD, THE SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF ABRAHAM, WHOM GOD HATH BETROTHED TO HIMSELF IN THE SWEET GOSPEL COVENANT, AND WHO LIVE IN HOPES OF THEIR NUPTIAL DAY, PREPARING IN GRACE TO ENTER INTO THE CHAMBERS OF GLORY AT DEATH AND THE GENERAL RESURRECTION, GRACE, MERCY AND PEACE.

TWO things, my dearly beloved in the Lord, are absolutely necessary to make souls happy ; first, that the thing possessed be fully adequate to the nature of the soul ; and secondly, that it be made over to it legally and everlastingly : for if either any thing be defective at present required to give content, or there be danger of losing it, it is not commensurate to the soul's state or need ; for as this immortal spark infused into man, whereby he has become a rational creature, is vast and capacious in its desires and dimensions ; so it is very lasting, yea, everlasting in its continuance and duration ; therefore the riches necessary to make it happy must be both suitable and durable. But all the creatures fall short in both. The soul of man travelling through this spacious universe in its contemplations, and following the guidance of the intellectual faculties, the soul's ear and eye,—can get no satisfying sight or report in answer to that curious inquiry, who will shew me any good ? To fix upon the creature, is to set our eyes upon that which is not, for it is vanity ; yea, to place our hopes on that which hath a lie in its right hand, and so becomes vexation of spirit in an overwhelming disappointment. Woe to man, if

there were no hopes for him but in this life, and great would be his infelicity, if it were true that there is no God, as atheists say and think. How poorly should this princely thing in man be served with the sordid husks of creature enjoyments ! How base and brutish would its life be ! How well becoming man would that epitaph of the Epicure be, which, Cicero saith, “ was fitter to be written on an ox’s grave than a man’s ?—*Hæc habeo quæ edi, quæque exsaturata libido hausit* ; “ the things my greedy appetite hath devoured are mine.” Let such brutified sots, that understand nothing of the worth or proper food of immortal souls, feed on husks, but let the heaven-born saints aspire to other nourishment ; if the mixed multitude of common professors linger after the Egyptian food of cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic,* real saints fare better—they feed on heavenly manna. The flesh and blood of Christ is the proper *pabulum animæ*, or nourishment of the soul. The soul hath a more delicate appetite, which requires answerable food ; it cannot feed on such coarse stuff as worldly delights. Hear David begging as for an alms—but what alms begs he ? “ mercies ;” and what mercies ? “ tender mercies.” Psal. xl. 11, “ Withhold not thy tender mercies from me, O Lord ;” as if he said, there are common mercies, that gratify the appetites, and clothe the bodies of good or bad, but these will not serve my turn, nor save my soul ; the mercies that will do me good for ever, are tender things of another stamp, that come streaming through the blood of a Mediator, that spring from covenant love, and such as can fill, and feed, and feast my soul for ever.

These are the mercies that God hath dropt into your bosoms, heirs of promise, and these are the mercies described and deciphered in this Treatise ; I have gone out to measure the Land of Promise, and according to grace received, I have

* Num. xi. 4, 5. ‘Οι δὲ ἄλλοι, περιπεφυκότες τῷ κόσμῳ, οἷα φύκια τινα ἐνάλιοις πέτραις, Ἀθανασίας ὀλιγωροῦσιν’ κατὰπερ ὁ Ἰθακήσιος γέρων, οὐ τῆς ἀληθείας, καὶ τῆς ἐν οὐρανῷ πατρίδος, πρὸς δὲ, καὶ τοῦ ὄντως ἱμερόμενος φωτὸς, ἀλλὰ τοῦ καπνοῦ.—Qui mundo adhæserunt ut marinis petris alga, contemnunt immortalitatem sicut senex Ithacensis, qui non veritatem et cœlestem patriam, eamque lucem quæ vere est, sed fumum optabat.—Clem. Alexand. Adm. ad Gen.

viewed it in the length and breadth thereof, and I have no reason to bring up an evil report on it; it is a land flowing with milk and honey, a blessed and beautiful land, which God careth for, and if the Lord delight in you, he will bring you into it. What though there be giants and Anakim of opposition in heaven's way, fear them not, for they are bread for us, they shall contribute to the saint's nourishment, and their defence is departed from them*; the Lord is with us, let not our hearts faint—God will carry us as upon eagles' wings, he will give us a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night; sure mercies in the way, and everlasting mercies at the end. This is the true Arabia Felix, yet far beyond that, which though it abounded with spices and gold, profits and pleasures, yet stupified the senses of the inhabitants with its palling sweetness: but there is no nauseous feeling occasioned by a participation of heavenly delights; the longer you enjoy them, the more you long after them, and the fuller draught you take, the sweeter relish they have. Oh the pleasure a soul may have in divine things! other things will disgust in comparison of these rapturous delights: no pleasures like those that come from above. But that which adds an emphasis to these is, that they are sure as well as sweet, abiding as well as abounding pleasures: God the author and object of them is immutable—the spring of them is the love of God—the meritorious cause, Christ's blood—the way of conveyance, precious promises; all these are settled and invariably the same; as long as the soul needs mercies it enjoys them, for we have grace to help in time of need. God will not, men cannot tear away these mercies from you, when you have a well-grounded title thereunto: God will not; for the gifts and callings of God are without repentance, and whom he loves once he loves to the end: men cannot, for they are above and beyond their reach. These mercies are made sure to you by a "covenant of salt,"† which is a symbol of incorruption: they wear not away with length of time, nor are they snatcht away by human violence: the tyrant's rage cannot wrest sure mercies out of your hearts and hands. This consideration is of singular use in a losing time;

* Num. xiv. 7—9.

† Sole et sale omnia conservantur.

men may take away our estates, liberties, and privileges, but they cannot take away our mercies: they may degrade us and remove us from our functions and offices, but cannot so dissettle our souls as to separate them from their relation to Christ, or a state of grace, or the blessed influences of grace. When Popish bishops took from John Huss the chalice, saying, "O cursed Judas, we take away from thee this chalice of thy salvation;" he answered, "but I trust unto God the Father omnipotent, and my Lord Jesus Christ, for whose sake I suffer these things, that he will not take away the chalice of his redemption, but I have a steadfast and firm hope, that this day I shall drink thereof in his kingdom."* Yea, men may take away the members of the body, but not the graces and comforts of the soul. Notable is the story of Agatha a primitive martyr. When Quintilian had commanded her breasts to be cut off, she said, "Art thou not ashamed, O tyrant, to dismember me of what in thy mother was the original source of thy own nourishment? But go to, rage as much as thou canst, yet two breasts are left, which thou canst not touch, the one of faith, the other of hope; they supply me with comfort and safety in the midst of torments, and abundant strength to sustain these, is repaired in me by the nourishment I derive from them."† Alas, it were a sad state of an immortal soul to have nothing but what supplies corporeal wants. How soon may worm, or moth, or fire, or thieves, or tyrants, make a prey of visible riches! The good things of saints are invisible: happy are you whose mercies are divine, you need not fear plundering or spoiling of your best goods; these are the true riches; though you be poor in this world, yet if you be rich in faith, you are heirs of a kingdom; you live as strangers and pilgrims, for your estates lie in another country: and indeed, a Christian is a paradox in this,

* Fox's Mart. vol. i. p. 823.

† Quintiliano dixisse ferunt ex cujus jussu præcisæ sunt ipsi mammillæ, annon te pudet, tyranne, membrum illud in me amputare, quod in matre suxisti? verum, age sævi quantum poteris: duæ tamen supersunt mammillæ, quas nequis attingere, fidei una, spei altera, hæ mihi vel in mediis tormentis solamen et tutamen suppeditant et earum alimento sustinendi virtus in me reparatur.—*Dr. Arrows. Tact. Sac. p. 195.*

as Justin Martyr observes of the ancient Christians,* that they inhabit their own country but as strangers; “they have all things common with others as citizens, yet suffer all things as pilgrims; every strange region is their country, and every country a strange region. A Christian’s politics are seemingly contradictory, and truly mysterious: they make a common table, yet are not polluted: they are in the flesh, but live not after the flesh: they live on earth, but have their conversation in heaven: they obey laws established, yet by their way of living go beyond laws: they love all and are persecuted by all: they are not known, yet condemned: they are killed, yet made alive: they are poor, yet enrich many: they want all things, yet abound in all things: they are disgraced, yet thereby honoured,” &c. Thus he proceeds, shewing the state of Christians; which is the same now. Oh what a mystery, yet felicity, is it to be a saint! all things are yours, though nothing were yours; a saint by covenant hath right to all, and shall have actual possession of what is for his good: the saints rule the earth, themselves being trampled on by all: they pass through the world as conquerors, and carry the spoils as trophies, along with them till death, and when death is swallowed up in victory, these blessed champions arise triumphant in glory. O Christians, study your state, know your privileges, be always triumphing in Christ: live at the rate of those mercies, make no reckoning of the world but as a footstool to raise you higher God-wards, or as a stepping-stone to pass forwards thereby, through this polluted and polluting world, heaven-wards: bless God for the least outward mercy, but be not put off with the greatest; a little with God is enough, all things without God are nothing. Suppose you be below the higher parts of the dust of the earth in riches, power, and glory, yet you are above them in grace, true riches, and favour with the God of heaven; therein he makes amends: as the Jews have a fable that the waters terrestrial, in the beginning, took it ill to be divided from the celestial by the firmament; the Creator to pacify them promised a sacred use of

‡ Omnia cum aliis communia habent tanquam cives, omnia patiuntur tanquam peregrini: omnis peregrina regio patria est eorum, et omnis patria est peregrina.—*Just. Mart. Ep. ad Diog. vid. plura.*

them below, in the tabernacle of the covenant; so although you are set below many in other things, yet in this you have preeminence above them, that you are interested in, and employed about these covenant mercies: this is abundant compensation. Be not discouraged, whatever you suffer here, it is not hell; whatever you lose for God, heaven will make amends; faithful is he that hath promised, who also will do it; God is yet able to pay his debts, as able and willing as to the first man that ever sought the performance of a promise: never any went away grumbling or charging God, (as some men are too justly charged) that he minds not what he saith. When David through weakness of faith began to stagger, and expostulate, saying, "Doth his promise fail for evermore?" he quickly checks himself with that reflection, "But I said, this is my infirmity."—Psal. lxxvii. 8, 10.

It would be a blessed thing (which Luther wished for*) "that our faith were as certain and firm as the thing itself believed; but, alas, sin in the flesh doth resist the spirit, so that we cannot so firmly believe;" as he complains. The way to stability is the acting of faith—believe, and yeshall be established. As long as we consult with reason, we shall still be fluctuating. An individual's expedient for establishment, after many temptations of doubt concerning a main article of faith was, a hearty humiliation and subjection of his understanding to the obedience of faith, which brought such clear light of truth and certitude into his soul, that there remained no relics at all of doubtation. We may all cry out with the disciples, "Lord, increase our faith." Alas, the want of faith is the root of all actual sins and insensibleness; yea, the want of a thorough persuasion of the reality of divine things surpasses the world. Most men do but read the gospel as a fine fiction, or a well-composed romance, but work not their hearts to credit these things; a may be, or may not be, in a conjectural uncertainty, is all they arrive at: however, they do not follow home the light and persuasions they have. Alas, did persons seriously think of this, that as sure as they are men or women, as cer-

* *Optarim fidem tam certam et firmam esse quam et res ipsa, verum peccatum in carne resistit spiritui ut non possim firmiter credere.—Luth.*

tainly as they eat and drink, work and sleep, so certainly there is a God—a Christ—grace—pardon—guilt—heaven—hell, of which they must very shortly have a full conviction. This could not but have a wonderful influence upon their hearts and lives—their affections and conversation. O what persons should saints be, if they lived under the thorough impressions and convictions of the certainty of divine revelation !

It were a blessed effect, if all the Treatises that have of late been written might convince this profane and atheistical world of the certainty of Christianity. Many have laboured much in this with great success ; several ancient writers, as Clemens, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Tatian, Iræneus, Athenagoras, and Tertullian, have proved by demonstrative arguments the truth of the Christian religion, against Jews, Heathens, &c. ; * lately, Grotius, Mornay du Plessis, and at the present day, Baxter, Stillingfleet, and others, have put their sickle into this harvest, through whom the church hath reaped precious fruit. I pretend neither to the learning or authority of those famous worthies, but insist only on the sure mercies of the covenant to raise a poor superstructure upon those solid foundations. It was the design of Luke the Evangelist, in writing his Gospel to the noble and excellent Theophilus, that “ he might be assured of the certainty of those things wherein he had been instructed.”—Luke i. 4. Such a design have I in this small piece. O that some might stand up and address the Saviour as the disciples did, “ Now we are sure that thou knowest all things ; by this we believe that thou camest forth from God.”—John xvi. 30. O sirs, be not satisfied with uncertain conjectures—endeavour to arrive at a “ full assurance of understanding to the acknowledging of the mystery of God,” Col. ii. 2.—pray for the spirit of revelation, that you may both know the certainty of gospel mysteries and mercies and your own interest therein, that you may both be strong in faith and full of comfort—advance higher daily in embracing unseen things—rest not in a sceptical *ἑποχῇ*, or philosophical state of doubt, but strive to arrive at an *ἐλεγχὸς*, or firm demonstration—rest your souls upon the testimony of God, as to the object of faith, and commit

* Vide Scult. Med. Patrum.

your souls to him in believing and well-doing for evidence of your state—remember that choice word, 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.” That this and all other soul-helps may accomplish this great end of your edification, consolation, and salvation, shall be the earnest prayer of

Your soul’s friend, and servant in Christ,

O. H.

June 3, 1670.

THE SURE MERCIES OF DAVID.

ISAIAH LV. 3.

— *Even the sure Mercies of David.* —

CHAP. I.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

THIS evangelical prophet acts the part of an apostolical preacher, pourtraying our dear Saviour in as lively a manner as if he wrote a history, not a prophecy; as if he saw him in the flesh and not in the type only. This chapter contains a sweet relation or revelation of the mysteries of gospel grace, a high sounding proclamation, and pathetical exhortation to the sons of men to embrace the saving benefits purchased by our Lord Jesus Christ.

This exhortation is pressed upon the consciences of men with four arguments, which are, as it were, a satisfying answer to as many tacit objections which may be made by unbelieving souls; these arguments are in the first, second, third, and fifth verses drawn from the—Freeness, fulness, security and abundance of gospel grace.

1. A person may say, alas, I am an unworthy wretch, I have nothing that can commend me to God, I have

neither penny nor pennyworth, money nor price to give, neither grace nor good works to bring to God. May I have a share in it? Yes, it is free, come buy, for just nothing, ver. 1.

2. But he may say, if it be so cheap, it may be it is of as little worth, too dear to take gratis; things of light price are often of as light use, and answer their rate, by being unprofitable—will it do me any good? O yes, it is of vast advantage; if you take pains for any thing else, you do but spend money for that which is no bread, but if you obtain gospel grace, “you eat that which is good, and your soul shall delight itself in fatness,” ver. 2.

3. But again it may be said, may I have a share in these mercies? shall I not miss of them? and when I once have them, shall I not lose them again? I am but tantalized if I see such sweet morsels and cannot reach them, and I shall be more miserable if I taste such pleasant things, and have them snatched away. He answers to the first, “all shall be made over to you by a covenant,” and to the second, “they are the sure mercies of David,” ver. 3.

4. But, alas, may a poor soul say, this is children’s meat, what have dogs to do with these sure mercies? I am a sinner of the Gentiles, salvation is of the Jews, and for the Jews; is there any hope for such strangers to the commonwealth of Israel? Yes, Jesus Christ is given for a witness to the people, to all people, that is, Gentiles;* “a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee, shall run unto thee,” ver. 4, 5.

The text falls under the third argument, and contains,

1. A double duty—hear, and come, that is, believe and obey.

* Isaiah xlix. 6.

2. A double promise, of life, and a covenant.

(1.) "Your soul shall live." Life is the flower and essence of all outward mercies, but spiritual life transcends a corporeal, temporal life, which is but a dying life, or living death; "Grace is the life of the soul." Spiritual life is the seed-plot of eternal life in glory. Mankind lost life by hearing the alluring temptations of the subtle serpent. Life is recovered by hearing the gracious words of life from Jesus Christ, "Hear, and your souls shall live."

(2.) "I will make an everlasting covenant with you." The words are in Hebrew, "I will cut a covenant with you." * The expression hath allusion to the ancient practice of entering into covenants, which was by cutting a beast into two parts, and the parties covenanting going betwixt those parts, to denote that after that manner should that man's limbs be divided who should violate that solemn covenant. †

Now, the great contents of this covenant are expressed in these words which I have selected and pitched upon to speak fully to, "even the sure mercies of David," which contain,

1. The sum of the covenant, that is, "mercies."
2. The nature of those mercies, that is, "sure."
3. The subject of the mercies, "David."

There is not much difficulty in the words, only it is disputed what is meant by David here. Now in Scripture, David is taken, first, in a literal sense, for David the son of Jesse; and, secondly, in a mystical sense, for Jesus Christ. It may be applicable very properly both ways here.

* **ואכרתה לכם ברית** Percutiam vobiscum fœdus, q.d. dividantur ejus membra qui juramentum violaverit.

† See the Practice, in Gen. xv. 9, 10, 17, 18. Jer. xxxiv. 18.

(1.) It may be taken for the person of David, the son of Jesse, king of Israel; and then, the mercies of David are the choice promises that God made to his servant David, described in 2 Sam. vii. 13—17, and in Psalm lxxxix. Some make the first words of that Psalm to be the title of it, and render it thus, “I will sing of the mercies of David,” because God’s covenant with David is abundantly held forth in that Psalm. But this phrase doth rather allude to 2 Chron. vi. 42, where Solomon thus prays, “Remember the mercies of David, thy servant.”

(2.) By David, is meant Jesus Christ, who is of the seed of David according to the flesh,* Rom. i. 3, and called by this name of David frequently in the Old Testament, as in Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24, xxxvii. 24, 25, Hos. iii. 5, and I conceive this to be the meaning of the words, rather than the former, for these two reasons:

[i.] Because in the New Testament, where these words are quoted, the Holy Ghost applies them to Jesus Christ, Acts xiii. 34, “I will give you the sure mercies of David.” Indeed, the Greek renders it differently from the original of the Old Testament, for thus it stands in the Septuagint, τὰ ὅσια Δαβὶδ τὰ πιστὰ; in English, “the faithful, holy things of David,” but all comes to the same point, for the mercies of the covenant are holy things. But observe the scope of that quotation in the Acts, which is to prove Christ’s resurrection, “for if Christ had not risen from the dead, the promises had not been made good,” so that still it relates to Christ.

[ii.] Another consideration that moves me to conceive that by David here is meant Jesus Christ, is what follows in the fourth verse, “I have given him,” that

* Acts xiii. 23.

is, David, before-mentioned, or Christ, “for a witness to the people,” that is, a witness to testify God’s veracity in performing all his promises ; so, then, the words may be thus read, I will make an everlasting covenant with you, according to the sure mercies of David, that is, the Messiah, who is to come—the mercies before promised, and to be exhibited in and by him in the fullness of time. The words are but few, being but three, * yet, they are full of sense and significancy, and are pregnant, travailing with the precious mysteries of gospel grace.

I shall only name some doctrinal observations by the way from the text, with the intention of reducing them to a single point.

Doct. 1. The covenant of grace is made up of mercies, it is a compound of mercies, the root, the branches, the top, the bottom of this chariot is love, grace, grace, all free grace.

2. Covenant mercies are sure mercies, they are not like the uncertain riches of this world, the true treasure is a sure treasure, the better part that cannot be taken away.

3. The sure mercies of the covenant are David’s portion : taking David here, literally, and the saints with him, so it signifies beloved ; all God’s Davids, or beloved ones have a right to covenant mercies.

4. Jesus Christ alone doth make sure all the mercies of the covenant ; so taking it in the latter acceptation, that David imports the Messiah.

The substance of the text and the fore-mentioned doctrines may be given in this one proposition.

Doct. That covenant mercies granted in Christ are made sure by Christ, to all the heirs of promise.

* חסדי דוד הנאמנים

The mercies which the Messiah procureth and applyeth are sure mercies.

That the covenant of grace is made in Christ, see, Isa. xlix. 8, "I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people," that is, "the mediator of the covenant," so the apostle expounds it, calling Jesus Christ a "surety of a better testament," or covenant; and again, he calls him the mediator of the New Testament; * and as the promises are made good in Christ, so they are made good by Christ, 2 Cor. i. 20, "for all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him, Amen, unto the glory of God, by us," that is, they are ratified, confirmed, and applied, by virtue of Christ's own meritorious undertaking. A text full to our purpose we have in Rom. xv. 8. "Now I say, that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers;" hence it is, that he hath sealed the covenant, by his person, obedience, and sufferings, (as afterwards I shall particularly demonstrate) so that the mercies must needs be sure. David, the subject of these mercies doth acknowledge the sureness of them, even in the Old Testament, in that famous text, 2 Sam. xxiii. 5, "Although my house be not so with God," that is, for outward splendour, according to the description of a magnificent family, "yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure," as if he should say, it is true indeed, God hath performed his good word to me in making me king, but alas, still my heart is full of corruptions, and my house of distractions; though the sun be risen upon me, yet I cannot say it is a morning without clouds; it is sadly eclipsed and overcast with the obscuring clouds of temptations as-

* Heb. vii. 22. Heb. viii. 6. Heb. ix. 15.

saulting me; I have committed grievous sins which darken my glory, and damp my comfort; Amnon commits incest with his sister; Absalom rebels against his father; I am driven from my throne and city; my whole family is wofully broken, discomposed, and shattered: well, but I have a well-ordered covenant in the midst of all disorders. When I am driven from mine own house, I am not sure that ever I shall return to it, but this covenant is sure; my outward condition is uncertain, but the best mercies of this blessed covenant are so solid and substantial, that I am satisfied therein; if God deny me the temporal mercies therein contained, yet if I have the spiritual mercies thereof, that is enough for me, “for it is all my salvation and all my desire, although he make it not to grow;” that is, though his blessing upon my house be not as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after the rain, to multiply my family, making it either numerous or wealthy, potent or magnificent; yet I have all that I look for, and that which gives me content, I have these sweet and sure mercies of this blessed covenant.

For the more distinct and profitable handling of this important subject, I shall, in the doctrinal part, discuss these four particulars, or principle points, and endeavour to shew,

1. What are the mercies of the covenant?
2. In what respects they are said to be made sure?
3. By what ways and means they are ensured to us?
4. How they are said to be made sure in Christ.

CHAP. II.

MERCIES OF THE COVENANT.

I. I MIGHT prepare the way for a consideration of covenant mercies, by declaring what a covenant is, and give some description of this new covenant, and distinctions about it; but I shall rather wave this, because it has been done so extensively already by so many able hands. Only for our present purpose, take notice, that in all contracts or covenants, even in any ordinary conveyance, there are four things very considerable, and indeed, essentially requisite.*

1. There are the parties covenanting.

2. The consideration paid or laid down.

3. The conditions required and performed.

4. The grant made, or the privilege to be enjoyed, upon the conditions, and consideration, called in our writings, the *habendum*, or the thing that we must have and hold.

Now all these are either expressly or implicitly held forth in one Scripture, which is, Heb. viii. 10.

(1.) There are the parties covenanting, God, and the house of Israel: "This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel."†

(2.) Here is a consideration evidently implied in these words, "after those days," that is, after those days of types, shadows, and prophecies, "in the fulness of time, the Messiah shall come, who is the substance, who will satisfy divine justice, and make an atonement."

(3.) Here is the condition of the covenant, plainly

* Mr. Herle's Christian Wisdom, chap. 4, page 227.

† Heb. viii. 10.

expressed in these words, "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts," that is, I will give that which I require, I will put within them a principle of grace that they may love me, believe in me, repent of sin, and obey the gospel.

(4.) Here is the grant, or good, to be enjoyed, which is the end and result of all the former, namely, "I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people," that is, whatsoever I am, or have, or can do, who am omnipotent, shall be employed for their good; or whatsoever they would choose a God for, or desire to be in a God, that will I be to them with whom I contract this covenant, and I will own them as my peculiar people.

Now the mercies of the covenant consist in these four particulars, especially in the last.

I shall a little open these, that we may the better find out the mercies wrapt up in the covenant of grace.

1. The parties that enter into this covenant, are God and man. Oh the infinite distance and vast disproportion! *quantus quantillo?* Heaven makes a match with earth, the great Creator with a mortal creature, the glorious King with a silly beggar! Is not this a rich mercy? Shall the cedar in Lebanon contract a league not only with the contemptible shrub, but with the pricking, worthless thistle? shall the sun of righteousness convey beams of love to such poor worms, yea, to such offensive dunghills? shall the beauty of holiness be confederate with sorry man, who is but a lump of vanity or mass of impurity? Yet, thus it is, and this is transcendent mercy; there is mercy in a covenant: God might have dealt with man in a way of absolute sovereignty, and done with him even as he pleased, without giving us any account of his matters;

but he treats with man in a rational way, as above the level of other creatures. God takes man up to parley and treat with him, as though he were his equal, "what is man that thou art thus mindful of him? or the son of man that thou visitest him?"* This mutual stipulation is infinite condescension on God's part, and advancement on man's. Man, only man, of all the creatures, is the subject of this covenant; angels had no need of it—devils had no hope from it—brute creatures were not capable of it—only man, and fallen man, hath an interest in it, and benefit by it. Oh the mercy there is in a covenant of reconciliation! Even after man had become bankrupt, spent a fair estate, broken his engagements, and brought himself into a desperate case, that still God should forget what was past, enter into a new and better covenant, entrust him with a new stock, and also lay help, not upon foolish man's weak shoulders, but upon one that is mighty to save! Oh rich, O transcendent love! this leads us to the second thing in this covenant.

2. The consideration interposed; that is, Jesus Christ, and he is eminently the gift of God,† such a gift as never came out of the hands of God, and was never received by the hands of mortal man, a rich and enriching gift, a gift proceeding from love; "God so loved the world, that he gave his son," John iii. 16. Christ is several ways a gift.

(1.) *Nobis*, to us, 1 Cor. i. 30, "who of God is made unto us wisdom."

(2.) *Pro nobis*, for us, Gal. ii. 20, "who loved me, and gave himself for me."

(3.) *Præ nobis*, before us, as an example, copy and pattern, as he suffered for us, so he left us an example, 1 Pet. ii. 21.

* Psal. viii. 4.

† John iv. 10

(4.) *In nobis*, in us, “so Christ is said to dwell in our hearts by faith,” Eph. iii. 17. Thus Christ is given to believers by sanctification, and inhabitation of his Spirit.

Now, it is in the second way principally wherein Christ was the consideration interposed, or his blood the price paid in this new covenant, namely, as he is given for us, a valuable consideration to pacify wrath and satisfy justice. Thus is Jesus Christ the *lutron*, or price of our redemption; “we are bought with a price,” 1 Cor. vi. 20, such a price as never was paid. Men pay money to purchase great possessions, “but we were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold,” but with blood, yea, “with the precious blood of Christ,” 1 Pet. i. 18, 19. Without shedding of blood there could be no remission, yet the blood of bulls or goats could never take away sin; * nay, the blood of all the men upon earth could never wash away the guilt of the least sin; no, no, it must be the blood of the immaculate Lamb, the blood of God, Acts xx. 28, so called from the union of the two natures, and communication of idioms or properties: and this is the price paid; the Father found out a ransom, and our dear Saviour gave himself a ransom:† certainly this is a transcendent mercy of the new covenant. I agitate not those nice controversies, whether God could not have pardoned and saved man without the consideration of Christ’s undertaking? or how God in justice can charge guilt and inflict punishment upon an innocent person? this I am sure, is God’s way of saving souls, and we must not dispute, but believe, that Jesus Christ is the mediator of the covenant, and the price of our redemption, as God-man; and this is the marrow of the rich mercy and deep mystery contained in the gospel.

* Heb. ix. 22, 12.

† 1 Tim. ii. 6.

3. In a covenant are contained its conditions ; what God requires of us, without which we can have no benefit by the covenant. These also are to be reckoned as mercies of the covenant on God's part as well as duties on ours, for they are secured and effected in us, as well as commanded and required by God. Luther makes this to be the main difference betwixt the two covenants ; the covenant of works requires obedience, but gives no strength ; but the covenant of grace engageth the grace of God for the performance of the conditions ; hence it is, that what the law commandeth, the gospel promiseth ;* what God requireth, Christ procureth ; what justice demandeth, our dear Saviour purchaseth and worketh by his Spirit in the heart. Faith is the great gospel condition, whereby Christ with all his benefits becomes ours, but faith is the gift of God, and " none can come to Christ, except the Father draw him."—John vi. 44. Alas, it is as impossible to believe in Christ as to keep the moral law, from principles of corrupted nature ; our state had been sad, and forlorn still, if God had not undertaken to work the faith which he requireth ;† it is only the arm of omnipotence that can draw the soul to Christ ; Jesus is the only author and finisher of our faith ;‡ there is an exceeding greatness of his power with respect to all them that believe, put forth to create an act of saving faith, || all they that have felt it, can testify that this is a rich mercy ; and this is one of the mercies of the covenant.

More particularly there are four important things promised in the covenant of grace, which are covenant mercies.

* Quod lex imperat, gratia impetrat. Evangelium dat quod lex exigit.—*Aug. de Spir. et Litera.*

† Duce Deo venit ad Deum.

‡ Heb. xii. 2.

|| Eph. i. 19.

(1.) Saving illumination. Jer. xxxi. 34, "They shall all know me, saith the Lord." By nature we are blind and blockish creatures, but the new covenant brings light and sight to the ignorant and erring sinner, and O what a mercy it is to know God and Christ, sin and misery, duty and felicity—to know Scripture truths and gospel mysteries, our own hearts and the sweetness of grace, heaven and the way thither! Certainly, such saving knowledge is worth a world; truly, such light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eye of the soul to behold the sun of righteousness, and the beauty of heaven; what blind Bartimeus would not own it as a rich mercy to have his eyes opened? and is it not a blessed thing to be translated out of Egyptian darkness into this marvellous light? O happy are the eyes that are anointed with the new covenant eye-salve, that behold celestial objects through this divine glass of faith, and become faithful guides in the progress of a holy life!

(2.) Genuine humiliation. This is another covenant mercy, Ezek. xi. 19, "I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh." A broken heart is instead of many sacrifices; a hard heart is the greatest judgment, and a soft heart the greatest mercy; repentance is God's gift bound up in the covenant of grace. Our dear and blessed Redeemer is exalted as well to be a Prince that he may give repentance, as to be a Saviour to give unto us remission of sins. O what a mercy is the spirit of repentance! they that have this godly sorrow shall never need to sorrow for it—such a repentance needs not to be repented of; "Blessed are they that mourn for sin, for they shall be comforted; happy such as sow in tears, for they shall reap in joy!" Certainly a converted sinner looks on a penitent disposition as a rich mercy; one

penitent tear is an orient pearl, of more worth than the whole creation; a bleeding heart is a blessed sight in the eyes of God and man—it lays the Christian under the promise of the covenant, and prepares him for remission of sins and the sweetest consolation.

(3.) Another covenant mercy which respects the condition is sanctification of heart; Ezek. xxxvi. 25, “I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean.” This is the mercy that David is so importunate for, “create in me a clean heart,” no less than creation will effect it; putting off the old man, and putting on the new in a sound regeneration, is a miraculous mercy. O what would a poor soul give for dominion over some particular corruptions, and power to resist temptations! why here it is, this mercy of mortification, which is also a Christian’s duty, is unfolded in this blessed gospel covenant, so that sin shall not have dominion over them that are under this covenant of grace. A Christian can do more to mortify sin, and crucify the flesh than another man. Every word of God hath a cleansing virtue; “now you are clean,” saith Christ, “through the word that I have spoken to you;” but the promises of the covenant have a direct and immediate tendency to cleansing, 2 Cor. vii. 1, “having these promises,” that is, of the fore-mentioned covenant, “let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit.” It is only gospel grace that can make us evangelically holy; and holiness is the image of God, the beauty of the soul, the duty of a Christian, and the mercy of the covenant.

(4.) A spiritual conversation. This is also included in the covenant, Ezek. xxxvi. 27, “I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my commandments and do them.” O what a blessed thing it is to have a heart to love, and fear,

and serve the Lord! O what a mercy to be enabled to perform holy duties, to walk with God in all ways of well-pleasing, to have the law of God written on the heart, and transcribed in the life! * yea, to keep God's commands with ease, alacrity, and complacency, not to have them grievous but pleasant to the soul! and thus it is when the Christian acts from an innate principle of grace and holiness. Well, this is the promised and purchased condition of the new covenant; God undertakes to put a new habit into the soul, his fear which is the beginning of wisdom, and principle of obedience. God gives the spirit of prayer, the spirit of power, love, and of a sound mind; † he promiseth to give them one heart and one way, that they may fear him for ever. ‡ O what rich mercies are these!

4. Yet the great mercies of the covenant are behind, under another division, for a covenant, contract, or conveyance contains the *habendum*, or grant, ensuring advantage to the party covenanting, and that in these words, "I will be thy God," this is repeated fifteen or sixteen times in the Scriptures; this, this is the mercy of the new covenant, the mercy of mercies, the flower, cream and quintessence of all mercies; God gives himself to the soul by covenant, and what greater or better gift can he bestow? if he should give us all the world and deny himself, we are miserable beggars; if he give himself and nothing of the world, we are truly rich; if we have God we have all things, if we want God we want all things. My God is my all, saith the assured believer. It is recorded of Thomas Aquinas, || the great schoolman, that a voice from heaven spake thus to him: "Thou hast well written Thomas,

* Jer. xxxi. 33.

† 2 Tim. i. 7.

‡ Jer. xxxii. 39.

|| Deus meus est omnia. Bene scripsisti, Thoma, quid petis? Resp. nil nisi teipsum, Domine.

what desirest thou?" and that he answered thus: "Nothing, O Lord, but thyself." This, certainly, is the language of a gracious soul, Lord put me not off with any thing below or besides thyself. What mortal creature durst have presumed to beg of God such a boon, if God had not graciously promised himself in the new covenant? What can the creature desire more? What can it now want when it hath an infinite God? All that God is, hath, or doth, is now employed for the advantage of believers; all his attributes and the good of them, are laid out for the covenanted soul. These words, "my Lord and my God," echoing to their correlatives "I will be thy God," are wonderfully sweet, as they use to say of the pronoun, *mine*, that though it be of the least entity, yet it is of the greatest efficacy;* suppose a man could with one cast of his eye take a view of the perfections of the whole creation, what were all these things to him if he have no interest in them? A clear title to a good thing completes the comfort we have therein. If God were not our God we could have no comfort from thoughts of him. What is God, saith one, if he be not my God? † if he be not our friend, he will be our enemy, and we had better have the whole creation against us, than God against us; but "if God be for us, who can be against us?" Now in the covenant of grace God undertakes to be our God, and this is properly that which this text intends, by "the sure mercies of David:" not in the singular but the plural number, as I conceive, for these two reasons: First, because God is the fountain, spring, and origin of all mercies; "all my springs are in thee," saith David. ‡ Hence God is said to be plenteous in mercy, and he is the Father of mercies. All mercies are vir-

* Relativa sunt minimæ entitatis, maximæ verò efficacæ.

† Quid est Deus, si non sit meus?

‡ Psal. lxxxvii. 7.

tually, eminently, and transcendently in God, and he that hath him that hath all things, hath all things himself.* Secondly, because the covenant contains all mercies in itself; when any one enters into this covenant, behold a gad, a troop, a train of mercies attend upon him; the covenant is a blessed constellation, and all the stars of gospel promises do lend their aid to beautify the covenanted soul.

Take a sample of the mercies of the covenant in both these respects, as

1. What God is to the soul, and so what mercies are bound up in the covenant; in this respect,

(1.) God stands in every endearing relation to those who are interested in his mercy, he is a father to them, 2 Cor. vi. 18; † a husband, “thy maker is thine husband,” Isa. liv. 5; “a near and bosom friend,” Jam. ii. 23. Abraham was called the friend of God, so consequently God was his friend; for this covenant begets and contracts the most endearing bond of intimate friendship betwixt God and the soul, and if there can be any other relation, that holdeth forth still more tenderness of affection; that and much more is God to the gracious soul, ‡ “as one whom his mother comforteth, so,” saith God, “will I comfort you,” Isa. lxvi. 13, nay, the Scripture doth testify more affectionate workings in God’s heart towards his people than can be found in the most indulgent parents to their natural offspring; sweetness of all relations proceeds from God, and therefore to be found in God; our relative affection is but a drop to this fountain, and our content in relations is no otherwise sweet than as flowing from him, or with relation to him.

* Habet omnia qui habet habentem omnia.

† Psalm x. Matt. iii. 17.

‡ Consult Isaiah xlix. 15, 16. Jer. xxxi. 20.

(2.) God is all that is pleasant, desirable and honourable; hence, we are bidden to taste and see how good the Lord is, and to delight ourselves in the Lord, and are informed that at his right hand there are everlasting pleasures; * he, he alone, is the object and centre of our desires—he alone, is the rock and rest of the fluctuating soul; therefore, David doth charge his soul to return to God as his rest.† God only is the sabbath and solace of the Christian's soul. Communion with God is heaven in the heaven of heavens. No desires so insatiable but may be satisfied with an infinite God, if regularly carried out towards him. O what a blessed thing it is to have God to be the object of our delight! the God of heaven is the King of glory, and he alone is the glory of a people or an individual, ‡ the best ornament is to have a God in covenant, Isa. xxviii. 5, “when the glorious beauty shall be as a fading flower—— then shall the Lord of hosts be for a crown of glory,” instead of their crown of pride, “and for a diadem of beauty to the residue of his people.” O blessed and beautiful ornament!

(3.) God is all that is required for safety and defence to his covenanted people. He is a sun and a shield; || a sun to direct in times of darkness, a shield to protect in times of danger. There are seven words, Ps. xviii. 2, that set forth this self-same thing: what a protection God is to a believer—a rock, a fortress, a deliverer, a strength, a buckler, the horn of his salvation, and his high tower. Every one of these hath its peculiar emphasis and significancy; I cannot take notice of them all, only hint at the first and last: a rock, you know, is a natural defence, a tower is an artificial defence;

* Psal. xxxiv. 3. Psal. xxxvii. 4. Psal. xvi. 11.

† Psal. cxvi. 7.

‡ Psal. iii. 3. Psal. xxiv. 10.

|| Psal. lxxxiv. 9—11.

God is both, in a sort, by way of covenant, in the first respect as our God and Creator, in the second as God-man, Mediator, appointed to be the only succour and shelter of fallen mankind ; here we may be safe and free from the roaring lion, the raving bear and uncircumcised Philistine ; he alone is a hiding-place from the wind, a covert from the tempest, —— “ and as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land,” Isa. xxxii. 2. An admirable place you have Jer. xvii. 12, “ a throne, a glorious throne, and a glorious high throne ;” and this, “ from the beginning is the place,” not only of our defence, but “ of our sanctuary.” Every word hath its peculiar weight ; who dare presume to meddle with a throne or to surprise a sanctuary ? The glory whereof will affright and appal them ; it is a high throne, how can they reach it ? It is from the beginning, and to everlasting, and what mortal man can lay siege to this impregnable tower ? The eternal God is the saints’ refuge, and underneath them are everlasting arms ; * therefore, are they safe from total falling, and fear of desperate evils.

(4.) God is all that is necessary for profit, advantage, and usefulness to the saints. It is said, “ money answers all things,” but God is better, and more truly answers all things ; as a precious saint used to say, God is good, when gold is gone ; no gain in the world like that which God is to the soul—God is our riches, treasure, portion, inheritance, and our all in all. David saith, Psal. lxxiii. 25, 26, “ whom have I in heaven but thee ?” and then adds, “ my flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.” God is fitly called the saints’ portion, for he is so one saint’s portion, as if he were no one’s else, and yet entirely every one’s, as if wholly theirs, as

* Deut. xxxiii. 27.

indeed he is, yet without division, partition, or diminution. That is a notable passage in the gospel covenant, at least one part of it, the mercy in it we are speaking of, Gen. xv. 1, "Fear not Abraham, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." First, thy *reward*, as if it were, as indeed it is, reward enough to have God, if we have nothing else. Secondly, a *great* reward worth speaking of, not an inconsiderable trifle, but a great reward. Thirdly, an *exceeding* great reward, no hyperbole can reach its import,* much less exceed it; none can express the goodness of God, but those that experience it, nor can they sufficiently declare it; but is he mine? Yes, Fourthly, by this covenant he is *thy* exceeding great reward. "Blessed are they that are in such a case—Happy is that people whose God is the Lord.†

Thus I have shewed what God is.

2. I shall briefly particularize what God gives and grants to those who are in covenant with him; there are many benefits, and advantages, which are, indeed, rich covenant mercies.

(1.) Pardon of sin, Jer. xxxi. 34, — "for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more;" and, O what a mercy is pardon of sin? ask David when he is roaring under his broken bones and disquiet spirit, whether pardon of sin be a mercy?—he will answer yes; O yes, I know it, and could even envy the happiness of a pardoned sinner. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, yea, many times blessed is he to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity."‡ This is a mercy that cost a great price, even the blood of the immaculate Lamb of God; it is a mercy that God shews for his own sake; a mercy that easeth the

* *Christus et cælum non patiuntur hyperbolen.*

† *Psal. cxliv. 15.*

‡ *Psal. xxxii. 1, 2,*

guilty soul of a heavy burden; a mercy that hath sweet and satisfying concomitants. O the riches of this mercy!

(2.) God's favour, love, and tender compassion, Jer. xxxii. 40, 41, "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good——Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good," as if he had said, now I am in covenant with them, I will seek and study in every way to promote their spiritual and eternal advantage; yea, and their temporal good also; I will be a fast and faithful friend to them; all my attributes shall contribute their assistance to forward the designs of mercy towards them, and what God doth for them is with his whole heart and with his whole soul—he will, in the relation of a father, take care of his children, and, is not that a mercy?

(3.) Gospel ordinances, Ezek. xxxvii. 26, 27, "I will make a covenant of peace with them——and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore——my tabernacle, also, shall be with them," that is, they shall have the means of grace, the visible tokens of God's presence, and ways of communion with God; and is not this a rich mercy? David looked upon it as such in his banishment from God's house, and every child of God prizeth it at a very high rate: this is one of the mercies of the covenant.

(4.) Seasonable afflictions, with a sanctified use of them, Psal. lxxxix. 30, 32, 33, "if his children forsake my law——then will I visit their transgressions with the rod." It is infinite mercy that God will take the pains to chasten his offending children; it is faithfulness to the great object of the covenant that God will fetch in his wandering sheep by the sharpest means; it is, as it were, a cruel mercy to let men alone in sin, that

they may hasten their ruin ; it is the father's care and kindness to chide and correct his son, and it is as needful as food and raiment. A child of God would rather be scourged to God, than allured from him in the paths most agreeable to human nature. This covenant mercy doth change the nature of affliction, and make every thing to work for the soul's greatest advantage ; this bitter potion is a useful, healing medicine ; this stinging serpent is turned into a harmless, nay, helpful rod, with which the Lord works wonders of mercy upon and for his covenanted people.

But time would fail me to enumerate the large catalogue of covenant mercies. From this fountain, stream to believers those choice mercies of reconciliation with God, filiation, the spirit of adoption, free admission to the throne of grace, acceptance of their persons, hearing of their prayers, assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, communion of saints, the benefits of Christ's passion, resurrection, ascension, intercession, an interest in all the promises, Christ's purchase, the Spirit's aid and comforts, freedom from the wrath of God, the curse of the law and eternal death, and lastly, an interest in, and at death a full possession of, the inheritance of the saints in light. These and such like are the mercies of the covenant ; in a word, all the goodness that is in God, and all that can be considered as real blessings in the world, are to be accounted as the "sure mercies of David.

CHAP. III.

THE MANNER IN WHICH COVENANT MERCIES ARE MADE SURE.

II. IT may be observed that there are some things absolutely and unchangeably sure, as to their own nature by an intrinsecal necessity; thus God's essence is immutable; with him there is no variableness nor shadow of change: though the heavens perish yet he endures, "he is still the same and his years have no end," Psal. cii. 24—27. thus God alone is the certain and unmoveable centre of the whole creation; he is the rock of ages, originally, infinitely, and independently sure, and so is nothing besides; other things are sure *jure positivo*, not of themselves, but by the virtue of God's appointment and designation, invariable, irrevocable, so as shall not be altered, or otherways ordered; for instance there is no new way contrived to save lost man; thus the scriptures are sure for ever, "O Lord thy word is settled in heaven,"* and our Saviour saith, "till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled;"† and in this way is the covenant of grace sure, not because of any intrinsecal necessity, resulting from its nature, but free to be or not to be as the infinite God sees good; as a covenant it depends merely on God's free-grace for making it, he might have forborne entering into this new covenant, and have dealt with man as with the lapsed angels; or he might have reserved to himself a power of revocation, to have called in his patent, and shut up his office of mercy, but now God hath fixed this as the only and everlasting way of

* Psalm cxix. 89.

† Matt. v. 18.

salvation: thus this covenant is as sure as that the world shall no more be totally drowned with water; yea, as sure as the standing of the lasting mountains and hills: yet further, as sure as the ordinances of the sun by day, and the moon and stars by night; nay, once more it is as possible that the heavens should be measured by the short span of a mortal, or the foundations of the earth searched out, as for the great and unchangeable God to violate this gospel covenant with his dear Israel. Read this fully in Isa. liv. 6—10. Jer. xxxi. 35—37.

But yet more particularly, this covenant and these mercies of it, may be made sure two ways to believers; namely,

1. Infallibly, so as not to miss of them, and
2. Immutably, so as never to lose them.

1. These mercies of the covenant are sure infallibly, that is, the number of elect souls set apart by the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth to eternal happiness through our Lord Jesus Christ, shall have interest in and possession of the fore-mentioned mercies of David. That God hath chosen some to life as the end, and through Christ as the way of attaining that end is clear in Scripture; Ephes. i. 4. "According as he hath chosen us in him—and ver. 5. having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself;" and 1 Thess. v. 9. "for God hath not appointed us unto wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ:" electing and redeeming love are of the same latitude and extent; whom God the Father in his counsels regarded, God the Son atoned for upon the bitter cross; "and those that are ordained to eternal life believe," Acts xiii. 48, which text, saith Calvin, teacheth that saving faith depends upon God's eternal election; hence also faith is called "the faith

of God's elect," Tit. i, 1. because it peculiarly distinguisheth them, for all men have not faith. Besides, God hath placed man's salvation upon the sure foundation of his own free grace, on purpose to make these things firm and sure to believers, so that their unworthiness shall not hinder the certain execution of his eternal decrees, Rom iv. 16, "therefore it is of faith that it might be by grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed," that is, that the covenant with all the mercies of it might be made good to all the heirs of promise; "the election, hath obtained it, but the rest are blinded," Rom. xi. 7; hence, saith the apostle, 2 Tim. ii. 19, "The foundation of God standeth sure, the Lord knoweth them that are his: he knows his sheep even before they know themselves, according to his purpose of grace before the foundation of the world.* Hence also, God would not have the enjoyment of these mercies to depend upon man's sorry, mutable, and inconstant will, nor upon any works wrought by man, as the whole strain and tenor of the gospel holds forth: and indeed, if the whole stress lay on man's free will, it would bring us back to a covenant of works; and if it were possible for any man to attain such mercies, he would be the determining cause of his own salvation,—and then what need of any Redeemer? Besides, it might so fall out, that these mercies might be applied to none; for, *conditio nihil ponit in esse*, that which is not effectual without a contingent condition upon which it depends, that is to say, the particular movement of this man's will, and so of another's towards God, being in his own choice, is doubtful and uncertain, and so must needs

* Dico, novit Dominus qui sunt ejus, ipsæ oves aliquando seipsas nesciunt, sed pastor novit eas, secundum electionem ovium ante constitutionem mundi.—*Aug. in Joh. x.*

be the privileges which depend upon that condition : therefore, they that make these mercies possibly every one's, make them certainly no one's. The truth is, God hath not left the enjoyment of these covenant mercies to the choice or refusal of the fickle or inconstant will of the creature at his pleasure ; but though he doth not violence to this faculty, but from its being unwilling makes it willing, God himself by his Holy Spirit hath engaged to bring souls home by converting grace certainly and infallibly, though sweetly and suitably to the nature of a rational creature. Hence effectual calling, which is introductory to these mercies, is not left at rovers, may-bes, or hap-hazard, but it is put beyond all peradventure ; so that there is a *must* and *shall* annexed to it. " Other sheep I have—they also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice."—John x. 16. " All that the Father giveth me, shall come to me."—John vi. 37. The God of heaven hath engaged himself for it, and he is a God of truth to make good his word ; he also possesses infinite power, he works and who can let it : " He worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will."—Eph. i. 11. All that God the Father hath given to Christ, the Son hath undertaken to bring to glory by his mediatorial administration: these mercies, then, are sure infallibly, the heir of glory shall partake of them.

2. They are sure immutably ; not any that do partake of these mercies shall ever lose them—they shall never be deprived of them. There are indeed some common gifts of the Spirit that God may revoke and take away, as the gifts that Saul had ; but these gifts of grace and this effectual calling are without repentance, Rom. xi. 29 : he will never repent of, nor retract these

* Vide sis Ames. Coron. ad Coll. Hag. adversus Remons. Artic. prim. de Electione, cap. 4. p. 15. &c.

precious donations—Mary's better part shall never be taken from her ; worldly riches may be lost, but spiritual mercies are durable riches. God, the Author of these mercies, is immutable, with him there is no variableness nor shadow of change ; he is subject to no variation from the contingent events of second causes. "The Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake, because it hath pleased the Lord to make them his people," 1 Sam. xii. 22 : he hateth putting away, he will not disinherit his children for misdeameanours, he knows their frame, sees and pities their weaknesses, raiseth them out of falls, and heals their backslidings. Christ Jesus, the purchaser of these mercies, is "the Amen, the faithful and true witness ;" "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever ;" "mighty to save, a merciful and faithful high-priest ;" "none can pluck them out of his hands ; he will lose none of those that his Father hath given him ;" "he will save to the uttermost."* This our Joshua will bring his people to the Canaan of eternal rest. The principle of grace, and these mercies themselves, are of a durable nature ; grace is an immortal seed, a never-dying root—*principium continuativum*. "He that believeth in me," as the Scripture hath said, "out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."—John vii. 38. Though grace is loseable in its own nature, yet not in the issue, because God upholds it. "The house built on the rock shall stand immoveable ; the righteous is an everlasting foundation : he that doth the will of God abides for ever ; † yea, he hath eternal life abiding in him." But may not they depart from God ? no, not totally and finally, "for God hath put his fear in their hearts that they shall not depart from him."—Jer. xxxii. 40.

* Rev. iii. 14. Heb. xiii. 8. Isa. lxiii. 1. John x. 28, 29. xvii.

† Prov. x. 25. 1 John ii. 17.

They may sin and provoke God to withdraw the sense of his love, they may lose their standing, comforts, and some degrees of grace, but never be stripped naked wholly of these sure mercies of David; God hath secret hold of them, and they have more hold of him than others have; they are restless and dissatisfied till they enjoy God, and till these mercies be clear to them. This golden chain stretcheth itself from everlasting, it begins in a purpose of grace, and ends in final salvation; "whom he predestinates them he calls, justifies, glorifies," &c.—Rom. viii. 29, 30. It is sacrilege to pluck one link from this golden chain; God is the finisher as well as the author of faith. It is not within the compass of any finite being to rob a gracious soul of the love of God, or stop the course of his free grace to those in covenant with him. Paul can make a bold challenge, Rom. viii. 35, 38, 39, "Who shall separate us from the love of God? and he makes a sufficient enumeration of all things that were likely to conquer the believing soul, and yet concludes, that in all these things "we are more than conquerors through Christ; there are in the word sweet promises that may answer all cavils and unbelieving fears concerning perseverance, which many able champions have produced and managed with dexterity and success. *

* See Mr. Prins on Perseverance; Dr. Prid. Lect. 7. De Persev. Sanct.; Dr. Ames Coron. Artic. 5. De Perseverantiâ.

CHAP. IV.

THE MANNER IN WHICH COVENANT MERCIES ARE CONFIRMED.

III. THE next thing intended is more particularly to shew in what way these covenant mercies are confirmed or made sure. Now there are several steps of making a thing sure amongst men, and God hath used the same means, (and even done more) to make these mercies sure to the children of men.

1. Men are wont to pass their word. When they promise any thing upon the word of an honest man, they expect credit; and among men this is current, and the God of heaven is worthy to be believed upon his bare word, (if I may so speak) for he is a God that cannot lie nor deny himself: “yea, let God be true and every man a liar:” even a Balaam is convinced of it, and must profess it, Numb. xxiii. 19. “God is not a man that he should lie—hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” The unchangeable God hath engaged his word in the new covenant: the patriarchs of old gave credit to all that God spake by dreams, visions and revelations, as in the instances of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

2. Men use to give stronger evidence by subscribing their names, and putting their mind and promise into writing;* hence the expression and practice of giving letters of credence, and we use to say “men are mortal, give it me under your hand, that will abide.”† Well, our gracious God hath condescended to subscribe his promises under his own hand, the hand of his blessed

* Hence Neh. ix. 38. “We make a sure covenant, and write it.”

† *Litera scripta manet.*

Spirit; the word of God is upon record, “therefore whatsoever was written, it is for our learning, (I may add satisfaction) that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope,” Rom. xv. 4: he hath given assurance to us of these things in the word of truth—“for this cause was the gospel written, that we may know the certainty of these things,” Luke i. 4. “and that we may believe,” John xx. 31. Who dare now dispute or doubt of the truth and sureness of gospel promises? since “heaven and earth may pass away, but one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled.”—Matt. v. 18.

3. Men use to call in witnesses for further confirmation. Some important business requires several witnesses; it is a standing rule, “at the mouth of two or three witnesses shall the matter be established.”* Well, the God of heaven hath confirmed the gospel to us by twice three witnesses; there are three in heaven, the glorious persons of the blessed Trinity, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one, one in essence, though three persons, 1 John v. 7, these bear record of Christ’s Godhead; and there are three that bear witness on earth, verse 8. these testify of Christ’s manhood—the *Spirit*, that is, say some, his breathing out his soul and spirit in his giving up the ghost, and *water*, and *blood*, that came out of his side when it was pierced with a spear, which shew he was real man, and that he did really die; Aretius † interprets these three latter of the Spirit in the ministry of the word, the water of baptism, and the blood signified by the wine of the Lord’s supper in which Christ’s meritorious sacrifice is represented, and

* Deut. xix. 15.

† Hanc sequor sententiam hoc loco, nec puto aliam posse adduci veriore.—*Aretius in loc.* See Marlorate in loc.

still this interpretation further confirms the gospel covenant, and consequently the mercies of it.

4. Men use to give assurance to others by affixing their seal; hence the practice amongst us of setting a seal to bills, bonds, leases, purchases, letters patent, and this seal hath usually a person's cognizance or coat of arms, or some impression upon it, and leaves the impression upon the wax. The God of heaven adds his seal; there is the broad seal of the new covenant, baptism and the Lord's supper are given and appointed purposely for the confirmation of our faith, and assuring our hearts of the truth of the promises, as circumcision is called the seal of the righteousness of faith, Rom. iv. 11; for by these seals both the grace of God is confirmed to us, and holy impressions made on the hearts of believers. There is also a privy seal, the seal of the blessed Spirit in our hearts; * Eph. i. 13, "—sealed with that holy Spirit of promise:" hereby God's children are distinguished from wicked men, and confirmed in the truth of the gospel; yea, it beareth witness with their spirits that they are the children of God, Rom. viii. 16. This is an elegant similitude, for all civil charters and testaments become valid by the addition of a seal, and the seal in former times was the note in letters by which the author was known, and a seal is the mark whereby genuine things are discerned from counterfeit: all these are the uses of the Spirit's sealing, to confirm our hearts in the truth of God in his promises, against all the temptations of Satan; this blessed sealing is more prevalent for our confirmation, than all philosophical reasons or demonstrations.

5. Another way to create assurance among men is a solemn oath; "and we know an oath for confirmation

* Eph. iv. 30. 2 Cor. i. 22.

is to them an end for all strife," Heb. vi. 16; and thus God willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath, or interposed himself by an oath.* It is very important to consider the form of the oath; God swears by himself, who is the living and true God, he could swear by no greater: and it may be observed, that two considerations make a thing more credible—1. The quality of the person speaking; 2. The manner of the speech. Now, the form of the oath to Abraham is exceedingly emphatical; † partly because of the asseveration, "surely;" partly because of the reduplication, "in blessing I will bless thee," if I speak it, it shall be done. Moreover, the form of the expression in Genesis is strange, ‡ for it is thus—"If I bless thee, thou shalt be blessed," or because I bless thee; or if I do not bless thee, (which is the form of an oath, Heb. iv. 3.) as if he should say, then let me not be true or just, yea, let me not be God. God pledges his faithfulness upon it, and may he not then be believed? But for what end is this? it is to confirm his promises, and assure the hearts of all the heirs of promise that he intends to do, and will accomplish what he hath spoken, that they may have strong consolation, and that he may take away all doubts and hesitation; and all this he doth for the heirs of promise; he would

* Ἐμεσίτευσεν. Invitat præmio salutem; jurans etiam, vivo dicens: cupit credi sibi. O beatos nos quorum causâ Deus jurat! O miserrimos si nec juranti Domino credimus.—*Tertul. de Pæn.*

† Gen. xxii. 16, 17. כִּי־בֵרַךְ אֲבִרְכֶךָ. כִּי est particula causalis et conditionalis.

‡ Quid tibi prodest si Deus se juramento constringit, si tu hæc quasi communem audiens fabulam transeas?—Jurare dicitur Deus, ut tu audiens paveas et intremiscas et metu consternatus inquiras quid illud tantum est, pro quo Deus jurare dicitur.—*Orig: Homil. 9. super Gen. xxii.*

not have done thus for others, but he doth this and much more to satisfy his doubting children.

6. Yet further, men use to give an earnest or a pledge to assure others of their real purpose to make good the bargain, and this is part of the payment. This also doth our gracious God, Eph. i. 14; his Spirit is the “earnest of our inheritance,”* until the redemption of the purchased possession.” An earnest is used in purchasing land, in hiring of servants, and in contracting marriage, and whenever the Lord puts his Holy Spirit into the heart, it is as a pledge of all the mercies of the covenant and of our eternal inheritance. And though some men may be unfaithful, so far as rather to lose their earnest, than make good their bargain, yet we may be assured God will not do so, for it is as impossible that any saving grace of the Spirit should be cast into hell, as it is for any sin to enter into heaven. God will not lose his pledge, but fetch the soul to heaven when he hath fetcht the heart to himself; grace is the prologue and prelude to glory, the first resurrection leads the van to the second; a gracious change prepares for a glorious change. “If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.”—Rom. viii. 11. The Spirit confirms the promises, and we need not fear any danger of retractation; not but that the promises are firm enough of themselves, but he would establish our hearts in the faith thereof and acquiescence therein, lest there should be any question.

7. Another way whereby men testify their cordial resolution to make their promises good, is, by doing a great part of the work, which gives real evidence that

* 2 Cor. i. 22. and v. 5.

they will do the rest; he that promiseth to give another a thousand pounds, and hath already given him nine hundred, may he not rationally trust him for the rest? or suppose there were but one pound, or a penny behind, there is great reason to confide in him for what is wanting.* Why, truly the Lord hath performed the greatest part of the promises of the covenant; the great promise of the covenant was, “that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head;” that the Son of God should be incarnate, be in man’s stead in life and death to satisfy justice, fulfil the law, and by his death bring in everlasting righteousness, and he hath already done it. Now, saith the apostle, Rom. viii. 32, “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?”† God is beforehand with us; yea, if we be indeed heirs of promise, he hath made good another grand branch of the new covenant, in giving the conditions of the covenant, faith repentance, and new obedience; so that the main business is already done, the writings are made, sealed, signed, and delivered, there wants nothing but actual possession; nay, there is a seisin and delivery of part of the inheritance,—and dare we not trust God for the remainder? certainly we have good reason so to do; the contrary is unreasonable.

8. God hath gone further, namely, to work many miracles for the confirmation of these sure mercies;

* Should a king promise to erect some college, and give liberal maintenance to students in it, we are certain by a human faith, that he will do such a thing though it be not begun; but if the foundations be in laying, we see its execution in part, and are assured it will be finished.—*Bains on Eph. i. 17, p. 144.*

† See Rom. iv. 8—10. Qui misit unigenitum, immisit Spiritum, promisit vultum; quid tandem tibi negaturus est?—*Bern.*

this is a degree beyond what man can reach to make any thing sure. Hence, saith our dear Saviour, John v. 36, "I have greater witness than that of John, for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me." This text shews the true and proper end and efficacy of Christ's miracles; they are not dumb shows, but have a voice, and cry aloud for faith in the intelligent observer; * yea, and they were wont to beget faith in the spectators, as Nathaniel believed, upon Christ's telling him of his conference at a distance, John i. 48, 49. "The beginning of his miracles manifested his glory, and his disciples believed on him," John ii. 11; and others comparing the doctrine of John with Christ's miracles believed on him, John x. 41; and indeed the argument of miracles is a cogent, convincing argument, "for no man can do those real miracles except God be with him,"—John iii. 2. Certainly, the wonderful things wrought by Christ ought to assure our hearts of the truth of the gospel, and consequently of the sureness of these covenant mercies. But upon this subject you have evident and abundant demonstrations from the pen of the Rev. Mr. Baxter, in his *Saints' Rest*, Part 2, in the Preface, and in page 215—234, to which I refer you. The truth is, God hath graciously condescended to confirm the gospel by many infallible miracles which none can question, and all this to make sure to believers these covenant mercies, therefore they are inexcusable that slight this way of the gospel's confirmation.†

9. Another step that God hath taken is the adoption of various means to make known to us these

* Igitur non sunt muta sed vocalissima; ideo non simpliciter intuenda, sed et intelligenter audienda.—*Marl. in loc.*

† See Heb. ii. 3, 4.

sure mercies, and thereby to give us assurance of them, as,

(1.) An audible, intelligible voice from heaven, at Christ's baptism, and his transfiguration, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well-pleased,"* and this voice, the Apostle Peter saith, he heard in the holy mount, 2 Pet. i. 17, 18, so that these gospel mercies are not cunningly devised fables, but divine oracles of undoubted truth.

(2.) The constant preaching of honest and unbiassed men, that were eye-witnesses of his glory. They give clear evidence of their hatred of evil, love of truth and goodness, and they could not be perverted by any selfish ends of profit, pleasure, or honour, for these were not proposed, promised or attained; nay, affliction and persecution was their known portion, and, therefore, they certainly could not, would not cozen the world with lies to get what was not attainable in that way.

(3.) God hath qualified men with admirable gifts to enable them to demonstrate the certainty and excellency of these covenant mercies; in the apostles' days, extraordinary gifts, as extemporary prophecy, healing diseases, working miracles, discerning spirits, divers kinds of tongues,† so that all nations might hear these *magnalia Dei*, great things of God in their own dialects,‡ and now they are translated into all languages; and God hath continued to distribute ministerial gifts for the church's satisfaction and edification. ||

(4.) He sent even his own Son to be the preacher as well as purchaser of these sure mercies. "He spake at sundry times, and in divers manners in times past by the prophets, but in these last days he hath spoken to us by his Son," Heb. i. 1, 2, the more to conciliate in

* Mat. iii. 17. Mat. xvii. 5.

† 1 Cor. xii. 8—10.

‡ Acts ii. 11.

|| Eph. iv. 3—12.

us reverence and credence, for he saith, “surely they will reverence my Son;” certainly, he declares to us the whole counsel of God, “for he was in the bosom of the Father, and came from thence for this very end to declare his Father’s will.”—John i. 18.

(5.) Yea, he hath raised Jesus Christ from the dead, so that we have a preacher sent from the grave to assure us of the truth of these high mysteries and sweet mercies; so the rich man could say in hell, if one went to them from the dead, they would repent and believe, Luke xvi. 30. Now our dear Saviour himself was dead and is alive, and as he is declared to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead,* so after his resurrection he declared the great things of God, confirming his disciples in the truth of things formerly delivered, and giving further testimonies and instructions, Luke xxiv. 44—49.

(6.) Still other means of manifestation are clear and crystal ordinances, in which, as in a fair glass, we may behold both the face of God, and the choicest mercies of the covenant; here you may not only hear the voice of God, but see Jesus Christ evidently set forth, crucified before your eyes.—Gal. iii. 1. In the sacrament of his holy supper, are exhibited God’s grace in giving Christ, Christ’s love in giving himself, his body broken for our food, his blood shed for the remission of our sins, and all the benefits of this new covenant.

(7.) Another way of the Lord’s manifesting these mercies, and so making them sure is through the sanctifying and satisfying illumination of souls by his holy Spirit—by his holy unction they know all things, 1 John ii. 20, “God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit,” 1 Cor. ii. 10, 12. Now the Spirit comes with conviction and demonstration, answers all the

* Rom. i. 4.

soul's doubts and cavils, and leaves it without dispute and hesitation; so that the believer cannot but say, they are sure mercies. He dares not deny this for a world.

(10.) There is yet one other way whereby God doth make sure these mercies of the covenant, and that is by a marriage contract, a mutual and matrimonial engagement in the perpetual and inviolable bond of the covenant, whereby Christ and the soul are inseparably linked together, and this relates to the particular application of these covenant mercies, and completes all the former; for, saith the poor soul, I do not question but these mercies are sure in themselves, in their own nature, and sure to some—but are they so to me? What way may I be assured of my title thereunto and interest therein? Now this, the Lord doth make good by entering into the sweet and familiar relation of marriage with his people; “thy Maker is thy husband, and I am married to you,” saith the Lord.* A believing soul is dead to the law, that he may be married to Christ,† and our heavenly husband “hateth putting away,”‡ once married to Christ and for ever married to him, death itself breaks not this marriage contract, nay, it fastens and makes it indissoluble; here Christ and the soul are but as it were engaged, then the marriage is solemnized with the acclamations of glorious angels, and glorified saints, for, saith the apostle, 2 Cor. xi. 2, “I have espoused you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” Now souls are fitting for that great solemnity, “when the marriage of the Lamb shall come that the bride may be ready.” || She is making herself ready in this world, she is married at the illustrious day of Christ's second appearing;

* Isaiah liv. 5. Jer. iii. 14.

† Rom. vii. 4.

‡ Mal. ii. 16.

|| Rev. xix. 7.

so then this marriage contract cannot be broken since it is completed in glory. But yet more particularly consider that remarkable text in Hosea ii. 19, 20, wherein the mercies of the covenant are made over in a way of matrimonial relation, and “ I will betroth thee unto me for ever,” &c. in which Scripture there are four things that may assure the heart of the security of these covenant mercies.

[i.] The author and husband I, the great Jehovah, the infinite God, the creator of heaven and earth, who speaks and it is done, who works, and none can let it. It is he that saith, “ I will betroth thee,” and who can forbid the banns of matrimony ? who is able to hinder this conjunction ?

[ii.] Here is the doubling of the phrase for greater certainty and security, “ I will betroth thee, yea, I will betroth thee ;” fear not it shall be done ; nay, the third time it is repeated, v. 20. “ I will even betroth thee,” what can any say more to assure a suspicious bride of a firm contract and marriage, as if he had said, do not distrust me, a marriage shall most undoubtedly take place. All this God saith to meet the incredulity of a guilty soul, that through fear desponds, and dares scarcely look upon it as possible or credible ; yet,

[iii.] Here is the term and date of the marriage, it is not for a week, month, year, seven years, no nor a hundred years only, nay, it is not only during life, as other marriages are made, but it is for ever, unto “ all eternity,” it never fails, it lasts as long as the soul lasts, that is a long day ; other marriages are temporary, terminable, failable, and “ death looseth a woman from the law of her husband ;” * but this is a marriage confirmed, and completed at death, and endures for evermore ; and then,

* Rom. vii. 2.

[iv.] The terms, the conditions, and the manner of marriage speak the sureness of this covenant, and the mercies thereof, observe it : Loving kindness is the motive to it, and mercies are the soul's jointure—righteousness, judgment, and faithfulness, are the writings, as it were, and evidences, to assure these forementioned conditions. Individuals sometimes marry such persons as they ought not to marry, as such as are too near of kin, and contrary to consent of friends, &c. and so are divorced, “but my marrying thee shall be in righteousness.” Many marry in a sudden gust of affection, and repent when they have done, but “I will marry thee in judgment.” Many marry fraudulently, cheat the persons whom they marry, lead them into a snare, and then leave them, but “I will marry thee in faithfulness, integrity and fidelity ;” we shall never part, and though thou be unworthy now, and mayest transgress, yet, I will fetch thee home, pardon thee, and maintain this marriage relation with invariable constancy and fidelity. What more can be said to assure the believing soul of the sureness of covenant mercies? Besides, consider, loving kindness is the beginning middle and end of the engagement ; he fetcheth arguments out of his own bosom to enter into this parley, and after he hath contracted this friendship, and intimate relation, the same loving kindness will influence him to maintain it ; nay, now his truth and faithfulness are engaged, and he will be faithful in performing all his promises. Consider that notable text, Mic. vii. 20, “Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.” Mark, it is mercy to Abraham because promised to him, but it is truth to Jacob, and now is a kind of debt, and must be paid, and made good. God is a “free agent,” yet he binds himself by promise, and so becomes a

debtor to his creature, or rather to himself on the behalf of his creature.* Thus doth God assure to his saints and spouse the dowry and jointure of mercies that he promiseth to them, in this contract of marriage, betwixt himself and souls.†

Thus I have considered the ways which God takes to make these mercies of the covenant sure to all the heirs of promise.

CHAP. V.

THE MEDIUM THROUGH WHICH THE SURE MERCIES OF DAVID ARE CONVEYED.

IV. THE last thing in the doctrinal part by way of illustration is, to shew how these covenant mercies are made sure, in or by or through Jesus Christ.

Now for clearing of this : observe these four things with reference to Jesus Christ, whereby these mercies are made sure : first, his hypostatical union ; secondly, his spiritual unction ; thirdly, the covenant of redemption ; and fourthly, the execution of Christ's office in the work of man's redemption.

1. Consider the mysterious and astonishing union of the two natures in Jesus Christ, whereby he is both God and man united together in one person ; by the former, he hath ability—by the latter, a capacity to make the covenant sure to his people ; so that now it is impossible the work should miscarry ; as God he is omnipotent and cannot fail or fall short of his end—as

* *Reddis debita nulli debens.*

† See *Zach. viii. 8.*

man he is adapted to his work, and fitted with a body both for active and passive obedience; so that there is nothing required of man's nature, but Christ, being in our stead, did effectually perform it, for the apostle saith, Col. ii. 9, "that in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, *σωματικῶς*, that is, naturally, personally, in such a way as he is in no other, "in him we live, move, and have our being," as creatures. God is said to dwell in the saints in a superior manner, as his children; but the Godhead is not said to dwell in any man except Jesus Christ, God and man. God dwells in the saints by his Spirit as in a temple effectually, and operatively; in Christ essentially, and substantially :* "the word was made flesh," and sometimes there were sparklings forth of his glory and majesty, so that the disciples "beheld his glory as that of the only begotten of the Father."—John i. 14. Well then, since this is an undeniable mystery, that God was manifested in the flesh, and hath undertaken to manage the work of our redemption in both natures, certainly he will make sure work in what concerns him, for so saith the prophet, Isa. xlii. 4, "he shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth;" he hath the powerful hand of an infinite God, therefore, he is mighty "to save," and he hath the innocent nature of a finite man, therefore he was fit "to suffer."

2. Consider the complete and abundant unction of Jesus Christ, whereby he hath both sufficiency and efficiency to go through his work, and authority for it also; the Scripture tells us that "Jesus Christ was anointed with oil, and that above his fellows."—Heb. i. 9. Christ was not only qualified with gifts fit for office, but also to furnish the souls of all be-

* In aliis sanctis habitat Deus ut in templo et organo, effectivè, operativè, in Christo substantialiter.—*Aret. in loc.*

lievers with supplies both for sanctification and edification. Jesus Christ hath the Spirit but not as others have it, for the saints have only a scantling and small measure thereof, but God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him, John iii. 34. "To every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ;"* but Christ hath it above all measure, for he hath the whole Spirit substantially, he is and hath the treasury of grace, a storehouse of riches to supply indigent creatures, "in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," Col. ii. 3. "therefore of his fulness do we receive grace for grace," John i. 16; "it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell," Col. i. 19, and this is laid up on purpose for the supply of his members, that from the head may be conveyed influences through the whole body, Ephes. iv. 13—16; besides, he is invested with authority for granting these supplies, Ephes. i. 22, 23, "He hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." Hence, he tells his disciples, "that all power is given to him in heaven and earth," Matt. xxviii. 18; add to all this, his fidelity, that as Moses was faithful as a steward, much more is Christ as a Son faithful to him that appointed him, Heb. iii. 2—6. Well now, lay all these together, and surely we need not question the certainty of covenant mercies. Since Christ hath sufficiency, authority and fidelity, and is thus abundantly qualified for carrying on this gospel design, he both can and will make good the mercies of the covenant to the heirs of promise; especially considering,

3. The covenant of redemption, which is an admirable, insuring act of free grace, engaging all the per-

* Eph iv. 7.

sons of the sacred Trinity to carry on this work, especially God the Son of whom we are now speaking. This covenant of redemption is that mutual compact betwixt God the Father and the Son concerning the saving of lost man, wherein each did undertake to act his part in this great affair, as thus : God the Father, hath chosen sinners, and given the objects of his choice into the hands of Christ to redeem, John xvii. 9, he was to part with his beloved Son out of his bosom whilst he came to the earth to do this great work, he was to uphold him, encourage him, put his Spirit upon him, call him in righteousness, hold his hand, keep him, and give him for a covenant of the people, and give him to see his seed ; * and though they be but few in comparison of the world, yet he will make him glorious, † and in time he will satisfy him by giving him “ the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession.” ‡ This is the engagement on the Father’s part, and then the Lord Jesus, the Son of God promised the Father that he would assume the human nature, and so become man, putting himself into the sinner’s stead and becoming his surety, fulfil all righteousness by obeying the moral law and suffering for our breach of it, be betrayed, accused, condemned, crucified, and buried ; that he should rise from the dead, ascend into heaven, sit at God’s right hand, intercede for the saints, &c. This part which Christ performed is fully laid down in Isa. liii. throughout. This was the great transaction betwixt the Father and the Son from all eternity. That there was such a mutual agreement, see Titus i. 2, “ in hope of eternal life which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.” To whom did God promise any thing before

* Isaiah xlii. 1, 4, 6. Isaiah liii. 10, 11. † Isaiah xlix. 5.

‡ Psalm ii. 8.

man was created? Certainly, he promised something to Jesus Christ concerning man's redemption as before-mentioned; such a gracious plan was laid, and compact made betwixt the Father and the Son, and he cannot lie nor deny himself.* So 2 Tim. i. 9, "who hath saved us — according to his own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus, before the world began," that is, as Christ was a public person, as head, instead of the elect, so we were given to him by this covenant, and that from all eternity, but how come we to know this, that are but of yesterday, and so dim sighted that we cannot see afar off? Why, verse 10, we read "it is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel," for Christ revealeth all the secrets that were locked up in the bosom of the Father. Well then, if this was the mutual stipulation betwixt the Father and the Son, there is no question but they will be faithful to each other. In the Old Testament God the Father trusted God the Son upon his promise to lay down his life, and so brought thousands of souls to heaven before ever Christ was incarnate or suffered; and now when Christ hath gone through the greatest part of his task, he trusteth God the Father to make good his part, that "he may fully see his seed, prolong his days, and that the pleasure of the Lord may prosper in his hand;" and, certainly there cannot be any failing on either part. Now this covenant of redemption is the platform and foundation of the covenant of grace betwixt God and believers; there are the same persons, and the like

* That this is no singular doctrine, but opened before, see Mr. Bulkly's Gospel Covenant, part 1, chap. 4, page 31—46, where it is fully opened. Also, Mr. David Dickson in his *Therapeutica sac.* book 4, chap. 4, page 23—71.

terms, proportionably, in both; hence, it is, that although a believer find an unfaithful, treacherous, and unbelieving heart in himself, daily departing from the living God, yet this covenant is built upon a higher and firmer covenant betwixt God the Father and God the Son, which cannot be broken and disannulled; the Father and Son cannot deceive or be unfaithful to each other; hence, then, it cometh to pass that the covenant and the mercies thereof, are so sure. I shall conclude this head with that notable passage of Christ's to his Father upon this very account, John xvii. 4, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do," that is, I have hitherto made good and performed the conditions of the agreement on my part, verse 5, "and now, O Father, glorify me with thine own self," that is, make good thy engagement, in my exaltation. So much with reference to Christ's person; then for his seed and members, he tells the Father that he had performed his part with respect to them, in manifesting his name to them, praying for them, preserving of them, and now when he was to leave them, he desires the Father to do his part of the work "in keeping those whom he had given him," verse 11; "in sanctifying and saving them," verse 24; and can we imagine but that God will be faithful to his Son on the behalf of his saints? Certainly he will, for as they were redeemed by the Son, so they were chosen by the Father, and as God the Father gave them to Jesus Christ, verse 6, and Jesus Christ died for them, and thus redeemed them, so God the Son resigns them up again to the Father, who will certainly keep them by his power through faith unto salvation.

IV. Another thing of importance concerning the ensuring of covenant mercies by and through Jesus Christ is, that these are most fully made sure to us by

the execution of Christ's mediatorial offices, both in his state of humiliation and exaltation. Let us here consider, first, Christ's offices; secondly, his states.

First, Christ's offices are of three sorts, sacerdotal, prophetical, and regal.

1. As Priest, Christ ensures to us many covenant mercies, for he hath put himself in our stead and offered himself as a propitiatory sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, which is "a sweet smelling savour,"* and of infinite value; hence it is, that Christ is called "a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people."—Heb. ii. 17. Certainly, remission of sins is one of the grand mercies of the new covenant, and this Christ assureth as Priest.

2. As Prophet he reveals to us the will of his Father, opens to us the sealed book, and anoints our eyes by his blessed Spirit. The Spirit of Christ inspired the prophets of the Old Testament, and the apostles of the New, in writing the Scripture, and ministers in preaching the gospel, and believers in discerning the meaning of the word, and beauty of Christ.† It is Christ as Prophet, that writes his law in believer's hearts which is one of the great mercies of the new covenant, that enlightens dark minds, and unlocks to us divine mysteries, and bringeth us from darkness to light.

3. As King. Christ Jesus doth what he pleaseth for the good of his church, converting and subduing souls to himself, granting to them the spirit of power, love, and of a sound mind, softening their hard and stony hearts, mastering their high and sturdy wills, awing, ordering, and centring their unruly, roving, and raging affections, subduing their strong corruptions, regulating their conversations, begetting and in-

* Eph. v. 2.

† 1 Pet. i. 10, 11.

creasing their graces, supporting them under and sanctifying their afflictions—all which Jesus Christ, as King, works for his covenanted ones.

Yet more particularly, in the second place, let us consider how our covenant mercies are assured to us by Jesus Christ, with reference to his *two estates* of humiliation and exaltation.

1. In his estate of *exinanition* and *humiliation*. Here I might run through the instances of his humble birth, his despicable life, that is, to a carnal eye, his being in the form of a servant, having no form nor comeliness; his hunger, thirst, wanderings, revilings of men, wrath of God and rage of devils—all these confirm the covenant, if we believe the history of the gospel. But there is one thing more that puts all out of doubt, which is, his real, ready, and voluntary death, for as he had a power, so he had a will, to lay down his life, and he died for the confirmation of this covenant, and all the mercies thereof. A pregnant proof of this you have in Heb. ix. 15; the sum of which text is, that Jesus Christ, the great Mediator of this new covenant, hath suffered death for the sins of his people, that were committed against the first covenant, whereby all true believers might have the benefits of the new covenant more surely and immutably made over to them; and this he further confirms by the parallel case of a testament and the testator even amongst men, ver. 16, 17, “where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.”* No man can challenge a legacy till he prove the death of him that left it, for while he is alive he may alter his will at his pleasure, or as reason requireth; but when the

* Thus the apostle argues, Gal. iii. 15, “Brethren, I speak after the manner of men: though it be but a man’s covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth or addeth thereto.”

testator is dead the heirs may look after their legacies. —Jesus Christ is the testator, saints are the heirs, the legacies are these mercies of the covenant. Now the *Testator* is dead the *legacies* come clear, and the *heirs* of promise may claim their interest therein; there is no alteration of the will when the testator is dead, there is no reversing, true Christians now come to enjoy their estates; Christ emptied himself that we might be filled—he lost his life that we might live—“he became poor that we through his poverty might be rich.” 2 Cor. viii. 9.

2. Christ's *exaltation* doth much more assure to us covenant mercies; and this exaltation consists in his resurrection and his ascension, both of which tend to their confirmation.

(1.) Christ's “rising again from the grave,” assures us of the certainty of these mercies; for though he was dead, yet he is alive, and so lives to be his own executor: if Christ had been detained prisoner by the king of terrors, we might warrantably have suspected that justice was not satisfied, nor mercies fully purchased; but “he was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification,” Rom. iv. 25, and now he hath conquered death, and “through death hath destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil,” and so hath delivered the heirs of promise from the fear of death, Heb. ii. 14, 15; nay, and by his resurrection he raiseth us to a new life of holiness here, and a blessed life of happiness hereafter:* compare Rom. vi. 4. with chap. viii. 11. Christ's resurrection abundantly clears the saints from all accusations and condemnation, Rom. viii. 33, 34; in this, therefore, we may rejoice and triumph as the source of our consolation. See Acts ii. 24—26.

* 2 Cor. iv. 14.

(2.) Christ's "ascension into heaven" ensures and secures covenant mercies to us, both as it sets him in the holy of holies, far above the reach of men and devils, and as he went before "to prepare a place for us."* He bids Mary, John xx. 17, to go to his brethren the disciples, and say unto them, "I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God;" as if he had said, now you may be assured of your interest in God in a covenant way, for I have on earth completely removed what obstructed your fellowship and obscured your interest; so that now you may call him your God, and come unto him as your Father, without misgivings within or challenges from without.

There are two things in Christ's ascension that assure these mercies to us: first, his session at God's right hand, and secondly, his intercession.

First, Jesus Christ is set at God's right hand in heavenly places, Ephes. i. 20, and the two following verses afford us two choice considerations that tend further to assure us,

1. That "he is far above all principality and power, might, dominion, and every name in this world and that to come," Ephes. i. 21; that is, Christ as man is advanced not only above all states and potentates on earth, but above all angels and arch-angels in heaven, therefore far above the devils; none can hinder, all are his servants to help forward his design for the good of souls. O what a sweet consideration is this, that our nature is advanced thus high! yea, in the person of the Redeemer there are alike sympathy, ability, and authority; and, therefore, he will effectually manage his glorious undertaking. Yet, that is not all, for

2. In the 22nd verse, it is said, that he "gave him

* John xiv. 2.

to be the head over all things to the church," that is, not only to be the head of the church, but to be head and governor over all things for the good of the church, so that now the whole world is subordinate to him for the advantage of his people, and now every thing shall help them forward towards heaven; yet, further there is something more in the phrase, and that is, that as the head is gone before to heaven, so the members shall undoubtedly follow after, and so salvation shall be sure, and this is very clear in that admirable text, Ephes. ii. 6, "and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Thus, it is as sure as if we were there already, for we are set there in our representative Jesus Christ, or the holy places and privileges on earth are an earnest of glory, but indeed the saints are already saved,* so saith Paul, verse 5, "by grace ye are saved," and elsewhere, "we are saved by hope,"* so that we have, as it were, taken up our rooms, as one saith, in heaven aforehand, whereunto, we have a just right upon earth by virtue of a union, which is the ground of communion, for "he that hath the Son hath life," † that is, he hath possession of it as by turf or twig, he hath, in a sort, seisin and delivery. Our head is in heaven, and although these things yet appear not in the members, yet because of the hidden union betwixt the head and members, that which is peculiar to the one is appropriated to the other. Hence, saith the apostle again, Col. iii. 3, 4, "Your life is hid with Christ in God,—— when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory,"—— when the opaque shell of our

* Rom. viii. 24.

† Quia nondum hæc, quæ commemorat, in membris apparent—propter arcanam tamen unitatem ad membra certò pertinent.—*Calvin in loc.*

mortal bodies shall be broken, then shall the pearl of grace shine forth in its lustre and glory ; yea, “ he will also change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto the glorious body of Jesus Christ.—Phil. iii. 21.

Yet further, in the second place, Christ’s intercession, now that he is in heaven, assures us of the certainty of covenant mercies, for he is Mediator,* a middle person, and so fit to negotiate the business with God, for poor man, and he intercedes effectually for guilty souls, by virtue of the worthiness of his own person and merits ; and as an advocate in a legal and judicial way he solicits for them and pleads their cause, and he appears in heaven for them, vindicating them from all accusations ; and will not all this satisfy ? Further, Christ’s intercession is of large extent, and of as powerful efficacy, for as he can refuse no cause committed to him, but must and will intercede, when employed, so he cannot but be heard always ; and his promise is as full, “ whatsoever ye ask in my name, it shall be done unto you,” John xiv. 13, 14 ; nay, “ I will do it ;” the intercessor is the executor.† But I shall not be large on this interesting subject of Christ’s intercession, because many have written much about it ; only take notice of that well-known text in Heb. vii. 25, for closing this head, “ wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” This text is a notable demonstration of the excellency of Christ’s priestly office, tending to the confirmation of this point and the consolation of believers, wherein are these seven things.

* 1 Tim. ii. 5.

† See this Doctrine of Christ’s intercession pithily and profitably opened, in Mr. Durham’s Expos. of Revel. viii, 1, Lect. 1, page 407—414.

1. The end of it, and that is to *save souls*, and the infinite God will certainly accomplish his end; men may fall short, but God cannot miscarry, “I work,” saith he, “and who shall let it.

2. The universality of it, “he saves all,” that is, all believers, rich and poor, whether they have more or less worthiness, for they are not saved for their own, but for Christ's merits.

3. The efficacy thereof, “he saves to the uttermost, [ἐἰς τὸ παντελές] that is, to the uttermost point or term of life, even to death and beyond it, or so as none can mend his work, for as he is “the author,” so he is “the finisher of our faith and hope,” consolation and salvation, none can come after him to finish what he hath begun; and he saves to the uttermost from all classes of enemies; none can challenge an interest in souls after he hath done his work, and he saves to the uttermost, that is, he leaves them not till he have brought them into the highest happiness that creatures are capable of enjoying; there is all manner of perfection in this salvation.

4. Here are the subjects or persons saved, “those that come to God,” or the condition, “coming to God by Christ;” now this is such a disposition as he himself doth work, for the power of his Spirit doth effectually draw souls to God, John vi. 44, 45; the condition is believing, and he works the condition. Christ is that sure ladder of Jacob by which souls may ascend to God, and into heaven; never any fell off this ladder, or miscarried that came to God by Christ.

5. Christ's ability to carry on that work, in the first words, “he is able;” this we cleared in the first head concerning the union of the two natures. “He is omnipotent,” therefore he is said to be mighty to save, and

if he can do any thing in this soul-saving work, he will not fail those that lay the whole stress of their souls upon him.

6. Here is his capacity to save, for the text saith, “he ever lives;” a living Saviour can revive dying, dead souls. If Christ were not alive, there would be no hope of life by him, in vain should we seek for living enjoyments among the dead; but our Saviour is revived and lives for ever, “he is the living bread that came down from heaven,” John vi. 51; “and is again risen and ascended up into heaven, and because he lives, we live also.”

7. There is his complete execution of his present office, “he ever liveth to make intercession for them,” saith the text, therefore, he must needs complete the work he hath begun on earth; like the high priest under the law, our Mediator sprinkles the blood of his meritorious offering here on earth, upon the mercy-seat now in heaven,* and continually bears the names of his saints upon his breast, and appears in the presence of God for us, Heb. ix. 24, so that we have a friend in our nature to own us in open court; yea, God the Father bade him welcome into heaven, and as a token thereof, sets him upon his right hand, which is an evidence of honour, (as Solomon dealt with his mother) and then bids him ask, promising that he will give him all that is in his heart. Certainly, then, the mercies of the covenant must needs be sure, and that through Christ, the Mediator, since his intercession is so prevailing, that he said in the days of his flesh, when praying over Lazarus’s grave, “Father, I knew that thou hearest me always.—John xi. 42.

Thus I have dispatched the doctrinal part of this

* Levit. xvi. 14. Heb. ix. 11, 12.

subject, wherein I have endeavoured to shew what the mercies of the covenant are ; in what respects they are said to be sure, by what means and ways they are made sure, and how they are made sure in and by Jesus Christ, the great Mediator of the covenant.

CHAP. VI.

THE SURE MERCIES OF DAVID FURNISHING A CONFUTATION OF ERRORS.

Now for the application of this point, I shall make use of it several ways. In the first place, for the confutation of Atheists, Papists, Arminians, and Socinians.

1. It confutes the vain conceits of Atheists who call in question the great things of religion ; they are first sceptics and disputants, then by degrees they grow Atheists and deny God—as one saith, in the academy of Atheism, a sinning soul takes these sad degrees. He proceeds,

(1.) To doubting whether there be a God or not.

(2.) To living as though there were indeed no God.

(3.) To wishing that there were none : and

(4.) To disputing against a Deity, and then he commenceth doctor in positive conclusions, asserting with the fool that “ there is no God,” * Psalm xiv. 1.

Many are ready to say, that religion in the power of it is but a fiery meteor, which the influence of those hot dog-stars of the times, ministers, have drawn up and kindled in the grosser region of some sick and melancholy brains, and so like fire is apt to catch in thatched and low built houses, not palaces, and castles, that is,

* Mr. Herle on Policy, page 52.

large and high-built souls. But the truth is, some Atheists do find, even in this life, the certainty of our religion, all shall find it to the their cost hereafter by an irretrievable loss of these sure mercies, and by the intolerable sustaining of everlasting miseries. As Atheism hath been much propagated in these latter days, so God hath afforded instances of remarkable convictions by several modern examples. Cardinal Richlieu, who after he had given law to all Europe many years, confessed to P. Du Moulin, that being forced to many irregularities in his life time, by what they call reasons of state, and not being able to satisfy his conscience, thence had temptations to disbelieve in a God, another world, and the immortality of the soul, and by that distrust to relieve his aching heart, but could not; so strong, as he said, was the notion of God on his soul, so clear the impression of him upon the frame of the world, so unanimous the consent of mankind—that he could not but taste the powers of the world to come, and so live as one that must die, and so die as one that must live for ever; and being asked one day why he was so sad, he answered, “Monsieur, Monsieur, the soul is a serious thing, it must be either sad here for a moment, or sad for ever;” and though Cardinal Mazarin was an Atheist the greatest part of his time, yet he hath left behind him evidence of clear convictions of the immortality of the soul, and certainty of another state after this life, professing that if he were to live again, he would be a Capuchin rather than a courtier, that is, of a Popish religious order, to serve God in their way, rather than choose worldly preferments. It is recorded of Sir John Mason, counsellor to Henry the Eighth and Edward the Sixth, that he called his clerk and steward to him, and said, “I have seen five princes, been privy counsellor to four,

seen the things most worthy of observation in foreign parts, been at most state transactions for thirty years, and have learned, that ‘seriousness is the greatest wisdom, temperance the best physic, and a good conscience the fairest estate,’ and were I to live again I would change the court life for a cloister, my privy counsellor’s bustles for a hermit’s retirement, and my whole life in the palace for one hour’s enjoyment of God, in the chapel ; all things else forsake me, besides my God, my duty, and prayer.” Thus he expressed himself. It is also recorded of Charles the Fifth, emperor of Germany, king of Spain, and lord of the Netherlands, that after twenty-three pitched battles, six triumphs, eight kingdoms won—after all this success, he resigned all these, retired to his devotion, had his funeral celebrated before his face, left this testimony behind him, that the sincere profession of religion hath its sweets and joys that courts were strangers to ; and we know from holy writ that Solomon, after his vast experiments and exact disquisitions left this maxim as the total sum of his large accounts, Eccles. xii. 13, “Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” Atheists never yet tasted the sweetness of religion, they never fully studied the word or works of God, both which would satisfy them. It is recorded of Francis Junius, that reading Tully de Legibus, he fell into a violent persuasion that God cared for nothing, neither for his own nor others’ affairs, * but in a tumult at Lyons, the Lord convinced him of a divine providence by delivering him strangely from imminent death, and also being put by his father upon reading the first chapter of John’s gospel, he was abundantly convinced by the force of the argument, and by the majesty and authority

* Nihil curare Deum, nec sui nec alieni.

of the style, in such a manner that his body trembled, his mind was astonished, and his soul savingly converted; yea, the works of God are sufficient to leave upon conscience, a conviction of a Deity. Lord Bacon used to say, that “a little smattering in philosophy might tempt a man to be an Atheist, but a thorough study of it would bring him back to be religious, for it would reduce him to a first cause and a last end.” But I must not enlarge on these Atheists, see them described and confuted in Weems’s Treatise on four degenerate Sons of Adam. I shall only add now the words of Lord Chancellor Egerton. “To be prophane is the simplest thing in the world, for the Atheist lays a wager against the serious man, that there is no God, but upon woful odds; he ventures his everlasting state, the other only hazards the loss of his sensual gratifications. If there were no God, yet the latter doth as well as the Atheist at last, and lives better at present, but if there be a God, as undoubtedly there is, O the vast disproportion at the great day! if the arguments for and against the verity of the gospel were equal, yet the gain or hazard is infinitely unequal; therefore, every wise man will take the safest side. Lord, what an age do we live in! when the choicest truths, duties, and mercies, from a principle of opinionativeness or licentiousness, are questioned or denied. Well, God hath his way and time to convince these wretched Atheists by real and unanswerable demonstrations, so that all men shall say, “Verily, there is a reward for the righteous: verily, there is a God that judgeth in the earth.”—Psal. lviii. 11.

2. What has been stated, notably confutes the Papists, because, in the first place, all these good things of the covenant are mercy, not merit; we are under a

covenant of grace, not of works ; “ the mercies of God are our merits. * We have cause to renounce our own righteousness ; alas, what are our best works to obtain favour at the hands of God ! Those before conversion, which they call meritorious, *de congruo*, are not truly good works, wanting a principle ; and those after conversion, which they call works of condignity, are not exactly good, not being without the stain of imperfection ; and, therefore, cannot merit. They hold two justifications according to these preparatories, the first is, when a sinner, of an evil man is made a good man, which is done by pardon of sin, and infusion of inward righteousness, that is, the habit of hope and charity ; the second is, when a man, of a good man is made better, and this, say they, may proceed from works of grace, because he who is righteous by the first justification can bring forth good works, by merit whereof he is able to make himself more just and righteous ; but we assert that the very thing by which we are justified and accepted is only the mercy of God, and the merits of Christ’s active and passive obedience, which are imputed to us and received by faith alone, and our obedience or performances cannot be satisfaction to God’s justice, because they are imperfect and defective, “ filthy rags,” † a rag, and cannot cover us, and filthy, therefore, will rather defile than justify us. At the great day, we must have some thing that can counter-

* Dei misericordia, merita nostra.

† They acknowledged Christ’s righteousness to be the only meritorious cause of this first justification, i. e. he procureth the infusion of this grace. All papists assert, roundly, that man is justified, *per solam gratiam inhærentem, tanquam per formam integram sine imputatione externæ justitiæ Christi.*—*Suarez, Lect. 7, chap. 7, page 83.*

‡ Isaiah lxiv. 6.

vail the justice of God ; Paul durst not appear in his own righteousness, but in Christ's, Phil. iii. 9, and how dare we? Certainly, Paul's doctrine is an infallible truth of God, Rom. iii. 20, " — by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight ;" and verse 24, " being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," and though Papists deride imputed righteousness ; yet it is mentioned ten times in Rom. iv. and frequently asserted and proved through Paul's epistles. So 2 Cor. v. 21, " as Christ was made sin for us, so are we made the righteousness of God in him." Now Christ was made sin for us no otherwise than by God's imputing our sins to him, for it is blasphemy to say Christ was sin by infusion of sin into him, or inherency of sin in him. Besides, our justification comes to us as our condemnation, which was not only by propagation, but by the imputation of Adam's disobedience.—Rom. v. 19. All the mercies of the covenant are to believers made over by a deed of gift, indeed " the wages of sin is death, but eternal life is only the gift of God," with all that leads thereunto, Rom. vi. 23. But, however, Papists may dispute in the schools, yet when they come to lie upon sick and death-beds, they are glad to come off with Bellarmine's, *tutissimum est*, " it is safest to rely only on the mercy of God and merits of Christ for justification." Let us still hold the safe way and leave them to their uncertain, imperfect righteousness ; but it is easily discernible what is the reason of the Papist's opposing free justification by grace only ;* because it would demolish their purgatory, masses for quick and dead, invocation of saints, worshipping of images, indulgences, and their treasures of merits ; hence, a modern Divine hath laid down the grounds that render

* Dr. Prideaux, Lect. 5. De just. fol. 64.

the salvation of a Papist in a sort impossible, and proves undeniably, that their contrivance for justification doth overturn most, if not all, the truths of the gospel, and is utterly inconsistent with God's way of saving sinners;* for it is the same for matter and form with the covenant of works, for the keeping of which, in the same circumstances as Adam in innocence, they say that Christ merited new strength, and now sinners are to stand or fall in the obtaining of life promised, according to their own performing of the condition of works, in the use of that first grace, and by this they merit perseverance and heaven; and lest indwelling corruptions and defects in duties mar this, they say concupiscence is not a sin against the moral law, and that there are many sins venial and not mortal, which therefore do not hinder merit and acceptance. Alas, what a new and anti-evangelical way is this, which confounds justification and sanctification, derogates from the nature of grace, enervateth the merit of Christ, altereth the nature of the gospel covenant, &c. But I must not enlarge, let us study this important subject, and beware of corrupting this fountain, or building on any other foundation than Christ's righteousness alone.

Secondly, the following is also an uncomfortable doctrine of the Papists, namely, "that a Christian cannot be assured of his interest in the covenant of grace, or of his eternal salvation." We hold that a Christian may attain to assurance of faith, without extraordinary revelation. They say a man may indeed attain to a conjectural certainty which only ariseth from hope, in regard of God who promiseth, but in regard of ourselves and our indisposition, we are to be at uncertain-

* See this doctrine stated and cleared in Durham on Rev. fol. 585, &c. vid. fol. 590—594.

ties. Certainly, a child of God may not only be assured of God's fidelity but his own sincerity. These mercies are sure in respect of the subject as well as the object, for the promises run in general and indefinite terms, "whosoever believeth shall be saved;" but I, saith the soul, truly believe, therefore I shall be saved, and this particular application and reflection is as much as if it were said, if thou John, Thomas, Peter, do believe, thou shalt be saved; now though the heart be deceitful, yet the Scripture hath laid down such characters by which a man may try and discern the sincerity of his own act in closing with Christ, for true believing is a receiving of him as he is offered to us in the gospel.—John i. 12. Besides, the saints "receive the spirit of adoption, which beareth witness with their spirits, that they are the children of God, Rom. viii. 15, 16, and this is "an earnest of their inheritance,"* which assures them of the whole possession; it is a seal, and takes away all occasion of doubting.† Paul saith of all believers, 1 Cor. ii. 12, "we have not received the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are given us of God," that is, these mercies of the covenant, adoption, pardon, sanctification, salvation. God hath laid it upon us as a duty "to make our calling and election sure,"‡ not in itself, but to ourselves, therefore, it is attainable, for God doth not command us impossibilities; he that bids us "try ourselves whether we be in the faith,"|| supposeth we may come to know upon an exact trial; besides, many of the saints have been assured of their sincerity and salvation by ordinary ways, which all the saints may use, and have a like success in a like full assurance of faith; and God

* Ephes. i. 14

† Ephes. iv. 30.

‡ 2 Pet. i. 10.

|| 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

hath bid us “ask that we may receive, that our joy may be full.”* Now, we are to “ask in faith,” believing that he will grant what we ask, and we have a promise to be heard, yea, he sets us on asking that he may give. But I need not stand long to prove the possibility of a child of God’s attaining assurance, for experience doth abundantly confirm it, and blessed be God that in this we can groundedly say the Papists are mistaken.

3. Another class whom this doctrine confutes are the Arminians, and that in two respects: first, on the subject of universal redemption; secondly, on falling away from grace.

(1.) The text saith these are “the sure mercies of David;” God’s Davids or beloved ones only have an interest in them, not all men: and in the *Doctrine*, I say, that covenant mercies promised in Christ are purchased and ensured by Christ to all the heirs of promise, and I must add—only to these, and to none besides; and therefore Christ died not for all. Here I shall only use these two arguments, which immediately relate to the present subject:—

First, Christ’s mediatorial undertaking is not intended as a price for any but such as were proposed by God to the mediator in the covenant of redemption, to be redeemed by him; but all and every one were not so proposed, therefore not redeemed. I have before considered that great transaction betwixt the Father and the Son: now, it is most certain that the mediator’s death and sufferings are to be looked upon as regulated and qualified in respect of their effects, according to what was proposed by the Father, and consented to by the Son. Hence Christ saith, that “he came not to do his own will, but the will of him that sent him,

* John xvi. 24. Mark xi. 24. 1 John v. 14, 15.

and to finish his work, and to give eternal life to as many as God hath given to him :” therefore Christ must by his undertaking ensure those mercies to all those, and none but those that the Father proposed to him in this everlasting engagement. As for that conditional giving of some to Christ, which some speak of, *that* would derogate from his glory, for he must needs know the event, and that such a conditional giving would not effect it ; and to say he willed what should not come to pass, or applied such means as he knew would not be effectual to the end, cannot be imagined. Besides, those that are given to Christ are contradistinguished from others that are not given to him ; therefore, those only are assigned peculiarly to be redeemed and not others.

Secondly, All those and only those whom Christ redeemed, have all the mercies of the covenant ensured to them, but all have not all covenant mercies ensured to them and conferred on them, therefore all are not redeemed by Christ. Christ is the surety and mediator of the new covenant ; and he gives faith, repentance, pardon, heaven to them for whom he is engaged as a surety, they shall not fail of any covenant mercies, that are absolutely necessary to salvation, for he is faithful in the execution of all his offices. Now, we know all men have not saving faith nor repentance ; while it cannot be conceived but that his satisfaction must be equally effectual for the procuring of these saving mercies to those whose place he occupied as surety ; and indeed God promiseth as a recompence to him, that “ he shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied ;” yea, “ he shall justify many,” that is, as many as he undertook for, Isa. liii. 11. If Christ hath borne their iniquities, they must be justified, else he missed of his object ; there is an inseparable connexion

betwixt Christ's undertaking for them, and his bestowing covenant mercies on them. All that are redeemed by Christ's blood are made "kings and priests to God," Rev. v. 9, 10. They are purchased to be "a peculiar people to God;" they are "washed from their sins in his blood, redeemed from their vain conversation, delivered from spiritual enemies to serve God in holiness all their days," and to be received to heaven when they die. These are the mercies of the covenant which the mediator purchaseth, and applieth to all his people; therefore none else are redeemed: for the proper and native fruits of Christ's death are not divided, therefore he prays for them that were given to him, and for whose sake he did sanctify himself, and passes by others.—John xvii.

(2.) This statement confutes Arminians in their discouraging opinion of the saints' apostacy. Some hold that there may be a total apostacy of saints, as the Lutherans; some that it may be final, as Arminius; others maintain that it may be total and final. We hold that believing, regenerate, justified persons, who are endowed with the divine nature and a lively hope, shall not lose that principle and fall from that state of grace, and be utterly deprived of the favour of God: indeed, we need no argument but this, that these mercies of the covenant are sure mercies, which they would not be if they might be lost. There is the immutability of God's promise in the new covenant, the intercession of Jesus Christ for believers, the omnipotency of the Shepherd of Israel who will not lose one of his sheep, the efficacy of the Spirit, supporting and renewing the seed of God, and life of grace in believers, and this seed of God keeps a believer from sinning in two respects: * first, he hates and nills in part the evil

* 1 John iii. 9.

which he wills and works;* secondly, if by human frailty he fall, he makes not a trade of sin, nor keeps a course in it, but the seed of grace makes him restless till he return to God, and be admitted into favour and fellowship with him. Thus, though good David sometimes “goes astray like a lost sheep,” yet since he cannot forget God or his commandments, Ps. cxix. 176. his heart was dissatisfied till his God and his soul were at peace again. This gracious principle inclines a Christian God-wards and heaven-wards; “it is a well of water springing up into an everlasting life,” John iv. 14; it is “an increasing grain of mustard-seed;” it is “an incorruptible seed that liveth and abideth for ever, an abiding unction, an engrafted word, an indwelling Spirit,” &c.† therefore cannot be lost. Blessed be God for this comfortable assurance, which doth not beget licentiousness as our adversaries reproach it, but diligence in the ways of God for the genuine product of it, as the experience of the saints testifies. But I shall say the less on this, because I have hinted at it before in the doctrinal part, and others have said so much on this subject.

4. The last class that are confuted by this doctrine of “the sure mercies of David,” are such as maintain the Socinian error, that Christ’s death is not a satisfaction for sin; the Socinians hold that Christ’s sufferings were only for the confirmation of his doctrine, or for the imitation of the saints, or at most, only to purchase to himself the prerogative to forgive sins freely. These ends are framed mainly as an engine to destroy Christ’s Godhead and personality in the glorious Trinity; and it is recorded of Socinus the patron of this blasphemy, that he held that “the world was not

* Rom. vii. 19.

† Matt. xiii. 31. 1 Pet. i. 23. 1 John ii. 27. James i. 21.

made of nothing," lest he should be forced to acknowledge the infiniteness of God's power, which he denied, and of Christ's divine nature, by whom he made the worlds.* But we, on the contrary, do confidently believe, that when the majesty of God was wronged by the sin of man, and when it behoved man to make satisfaction to justice, or never be freed from the sentence of condemnation, or obtain reconciliation; this being beyond the power of a finite creature—Christ, God-man did interpose himself in our stead to be a sacrifice for us to satisfy justice, and bring in everlasting righteousness, which satisfaction is accepted of God the Father, and imputed to the sincere believer. This is the sum of the gospel, and clearly held forth therein to all that are not wilfully blind. In Isa. liii. 6, it is said, "the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all," and saith the apostle, "he became sin for us,"† that is, in our room or stead; hence he is called "a surety" on paying our debt, and "a ransom," and his death is called "a propitiation, an expiatory sacrifice, by enduring the curse for us, and washing us from our sins in his own blood, and purchasing his church with his own blood," that is, the blood of God-man.‡ But the Scripture is full of testimonies, and the subject I have been so largely insisting upon in the doctrinal part abundantly evinces, that Jesus Christ as mediator of the new covenant doth ensure the mercies of it to all the heirs of promise by his meritorious undertaking, which I have abundantly proved; and the Socinians denying this, do also deny the merit and excellency of Christ's obedience and death, and his divine nature, and so deserve not to be ranked among the number

* Heb. i. 2.

† 2 Cor. v. 21.

‡ Heb. vii. 22. Job xxxiii. 24. Gal. iii. 13, 14. Rev. i. 5. Acts xx. 28.

of Christians. The Lord preserve us from those black and destructive ways of error and heresy, and imbue our hearts with a thorough sense and experience of these “sure mercies of David;” for all Dagon will fall before this ark of the covenant, and the clear understanding of this doctrine will rectify many mistakes; the right conceiving, and unfeigned embracing of these new covenant mercies, is the greatest help to a sound mind, and sincere heart which are great preservatives against error and apostacy.

CHAP. VII.

THE SURE MERCIES OF DAVID CONSIDERED AS CONTRIBUTING INSTRUCTION.

II. THIS subject may be regarded as contributing instruction, since we may be informed relative to sundry very necessary truths, and directed in several duties from the consideration of these “sure mercies of David,” and the previously described way of making them sure.

1. It instructs concerning the great difference betwixt the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Divines use to make several distinctions betwixt them. But indeed this is the main, that the former was dependent on an inherent righteousness, the other on one imputed; in the first, man was to perform personal, perfect, and perpetual righteousness—in this second, our surety and great mediator undertakes it for us, and it is applied to us by faith, which is now become the evangelical condition, in the room of the legal condition of complete obedience; so that was settled be-

twixt God and man immediately, this through an interposing mediator, Gal. iii. 19; the former was soon broken, because though man was upright, yet he was mutable, and that we feel to our cost; but Jesus Christ the great mediator of this new covenant is “the Lord Jehovah, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace, able to save to the uttermost; he is God and changeth not, therefore we are not consumed, and therefore are souls saved.” Hence saith the apostle, Heb. viii. 6, “He (that is, Jesus Christ) hath obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant which was established upon better promises.” Indeed the excellency of the covenant doth chiefly arise from the excellency of the mediator of it, and the manner of its confirmation, which is Christ, God-man by his active and passive obedience, who is frequently called our mediator.* Although that place in the Hebrews doth rather respect the form of administering the covenant than the matter, and it is a comparison betwixt the dispensation to the fathers under the law, and the dispensation in gospel times; for they had the same covenant of grace, though under shadows and types, that we enjoy in substance and performance, yet by consequence it holds forth the precedency of our gospel covenant above, and beyond the legal covenant which was made with Adam.

That I may a little further unfold this, there are two things illustriously shining in this gospel covenant: first, the grace and love of God; secondly, the wisdom of God.

(1.) Consider the infinite mercy, favour and compas-

* Heb. vii. 22. ix. 15. xii. 24. 1 Tim. ii. 8. Verum hæc Apostoli comparatio ad formam potius quam ad materiam referenda.—*Calv. in loc.*

sion, the tenderness, love and condescension of the great God in renewing the covenant which man had broken. I confess there are many curious questions asked concerning these two covenants, such as these : Could not God as well have secured the conditions of the first covenant, by assisting Adam with grace to perform them, and persevere therein ? and again, Why might not the first covenant have been spared, and this second have answered the purpose of both ? But what is man that he should find fault with God's pleasure ? Yet we might answer all these with the assertion and admiration of God's infinite wisdom and mercy. His glorious attributes all aid one another—mercy employs power, power supports truth, truth seconds justice, and they do all employ wisdom, and wisdom doth order all to his glory. If there had not been a first covenant, there had not been a trial of man's obedience; if it had been kept, God's wisdom had not appeared in repairing the breach, nor his love in sending his Son, nor his justice and power in triumphing over Satan's malice, and gaining advantage thereby. Besides, if there had been no first covenant violated, there could not have been such a glorious display of free grace in the reconciliation betwixt God and man, which implies both a covenant and a breach. O the mercy of God in Christ ! it is wonderful, stupendous mercy that God was willing to hold any correspondence with man in a covenant way, who had broken with him before. Yet free grace would not any more trust sorry man that had been a bankrupt, with a stock in his own hands : yea, God staid not till man sought out for this surety, but prevented him with free grace. We read that when Augustus made a proclamation, that whoever would bring him the head of Carocotta the Spanish pirate, should have a rich reward ; Carocotta hearing

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of it came and presented his head to the emperor, and challenged the reward: but when man had fallen he runs away, endeavours to hide himself, yet love pursues and overtakes him, and contracts with guilty Adam, a better, and unthought of, unsought for covenant. Parmenio's large letter to Alexander against Olympias, was all answered with one tear of a mother: but where is there any one tear to bewail or make amends for man's horrid crime? no, not a word to procure favour; free grace did all to bring traitors into a league. God's heart was full; he could not hold but call he must, and seek and run to fetch home apostate man, that profligate rebel, who durst not shew his face, or ask forgiveness: but the Lord of life and glory, the King of heaven is ready to forgive, and to give the glorious things of heaven to them that inquired not after them.

(2.) Here behold such a display of wisdom, as "never eye beheld, ear heard, or heart conceived;" the apostle calls it "the manifold wisdom of God." I cannot here stand to open all the parts thereof that fall within the reach of a finite view; I shall only endeavour to unfold one of its branches, by explaining this strange paradox, namely, how it could be possible, since God himself is immutable—since the moral law, which is an obligation of the creature to obedience, is irrevocable—and since man hath now broken it, and death and wrath have been threatened thereupon. I ask, whence does it come to pass that the malediction and condemnation are not executed? no, nor perfect obedience exacted, as the nature of the law requires? The direct and proper force of the law is obedience, the secondary and conditional effect of it, is a binding over to the curse upon supposition of disobedience; but we see the law doth neither, and yet the Scripture testifies of the

word of God, that it is “settled for ever in heaven, that his commandments are sure and stand fast for ever, that one tittle of the law cannot fail.”* How comes it to pass then, that the law is neither thoroughly obeyed nor executed? obeyed it is not, for “all have sinned, and by the deeds of the law is no flesh justified:” executed it is not, for “there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ, and they are delivered from the curse of the law:”† abrogated or extinguished it is not, for then there would be no sin nor duty, reward nor punishment: no, nor is it moderated or favourably interpreted, by rules of equity to abate the rigour of it, for it is inflexible, and the text saith, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written, in the book of the law to do them.”‡ Therefore there is no way but one, that is, that the law should so far be dispensed with, as that a surety be accepted instead of the malefactor, this is the blessed design of the gospel. God is willing to allow and accept a surety, Jesus Christ is willing to undertake and perform this office, and the believer is willing to embrace this blessed mediator, and thus the agreement is made, the covenant is renewed, and the law is established. Yea, by this gospel way of saving souls, he doth magnify the law, and make it honourable; the obligations of the law are discharged in Christ by the second covenant, our surety hath fulfilled its duties by his active obedience, and undergone its curses in his sufferings and death, and both better by Christ than ever it was possible for man to satisfy. Adam in innocency and the angelical nature could not have obeyed the law so perfectly, (at least so meritoriously)

* Psalm cxix. 89. Psalm cxi. 7, 8. Luke xvi. 17.

† Rom. iii. 20, 23. Rom. viii. 1. Gal. iii. 13.

‡ Gal. iii. 10.

as our surety hath done, and if we had lain for ever in hell, we could not have satisfied justice so as our Saviour did by his short, yet infinite sufferings satisfy for our woful breach of divine commands. Thus, it is often said, is the law established,* Christ was delivered to the law, and we are delivered from it, and now believing souls are married to Christ, and are no more under the malediction of it.† God's grace numbereth the saints as Christ's seed, bindeth all in the same contract, and accepteth man and wife as one in a law sense, so that the wife shines in the rays of her husband's beauty.‡ Divines illustrate it by the similitude of a wall that is green either by the colour inherent, or else by the same colour in some diaphanous transparent body, as glass, through which the sun shining doth affect it with that colour; thus, in the latter sense, Christ's righteousness presents us in his own colour to the Father: so that word is to be understood, Matt. iii. 17, "This is my beloved Son, in whom," not in whom as *with his person only*, but "in whom I am well pleased;" that is, through his merits and mediation I accept of and delight in all that believe, and come unto me by him. O astonishing contrivance of free grace! we cannot well conceive, nor sufficiently admire the wisdom of God in laying this blessed plan and platform for our redemption; rich grace and profound wisdom seem to vie with each other in this glorious fabric. If every man, saith one, were as wise as an angel, and every angel a seraph, (a flame burning with the fervour of divine love, and reflecting the celestial light of knowledge) they could never have found out such an expedient to reconcile God and man; the very angels themselves admire it, and would willingly be-

* Rom. iii. 31. viii. 2—4.

† Rom. vii. 4, 6.

‡ Uxor fulget radiis mariti.

come scholars to the church, to understand more of the height and depth of this glorious mystery;* but this shall never be rightly understood till believers, face to face, see him who devised and effected this work, and their faculties be enlarged to take in more of God's grace and wisdom.

2. Another consequence is this, if the mercies of the covenant be made sure in Christ, it lets us see the great difference betwixt covenant mercies and common mercies, temporal and spiritual mercies. Saul's mercies that God took away, and the sure mercies of David founded upon the covenant of grace, 1 Chron. xvii. 13, discover their difference principally in these four particulars.

(1.) They differ in the fountain, origin, and rise thereof, or in the affection of the giver. Outward mercies proceed from common bounty, these gospel mercies from special grace; the former from general munificence, the other from peculiar benevolence; the former are but crumbs for dogs, these are bread for babes, all things come alike to all, so that none can know love or or hatred by the want or abundance of creature comforts, but the mercies of the covenant are always tokens of special affection.† Luther calls the whole Turkish empire but “a morsel cast to dogs,” but a portion of grace is a child's patrimony. God hates the wicked though he give them the world; he loves the godly, though he deny them worldly enjoyments;‡ he may give that to his enemies in anger which he denies his children in love; he gives to many wicked, giftless gifts, as some call them; but he gives his grace, his heart, himself, to his saints with covenant mercies. These are always clear evidences of special

* 1 Pet. i. 12. Eph. iii. 10.

† See Eccles. ix. 1—3.

‡ Deus sæpe dat iratus quod negat propitius.

love ; they are bracelets and jewels that are sent as love tokens to the espoused saint from the celestial husband.

(2.) They differ in the dimensions of the gifts, their nature, properties and adaptedness to the precious and immortal soul. Temporal mercies may, indeed, supply the outward man, the clothes cover nakedness, fire may warm, meat may fill, and drink may quench thirst, but all these serve but to supply corporeal necessities ; they do not reach the soul—he was a fool that said, “ soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry ;”^{*} and well might he be called a fool, for alas, what were those goods to the soul ? it was a sensual, brutish soul that could be satisfied with these things ; they bear no proportion to the nature of the immortal, heaven-born soul, it is above them, and when it comes to itself, scorns to feed on such refuse or wind. It is recorded of Pasotes, that he called his friends to a banquet, where they should see a table furnished with variety and plenty, but that when the guests went to eat, it vanished away into nothing, and truly so will worldly enjoyments, they promise fair and perform nothing ; not but that these are useful mercies in their kind, and do attain their end, which was to accommodate the outward man, though they were never designed to satisfy souls, but covenant mercies fill and feast the soul ; pardon of sin, sense of God’s love, Jesus Christ, and the benefits flowing from him, these are adequate to the nature and faculties of precious souls. “ These satiate the souls both of priests and people with fatness and goodness ; † yea, they are abundantly satisfied with the fatness of his house,” ‡ this living bread and water nourisheth immortal souls to eternal life ; hence it is, that holy

^{*} Luke xii. 19, 20. † Jer. xxxi. 14. ‡ Psalm xxxvi. 8.

David prays, Psalm xl. 11, “—— withhold not thy tender mercies from me, O Lord;” as if he had said, Lord, my soul is a fine delicate thing, it cannot do with the coarse fare of common mercies; these husks are for the swine of the world, I must have bread at “my Father’s table,” my soul must have “angels’ food,” or it will not like nor live: Lord, let me have tender mercies, for my tender soul: otherwise I shall famish and die, therefore he prays again, “Let thy tender mercies come unto me that I may live,” Psalm cxix. 77, and again, verse 132, “Look upon me and be merciful, as thou used to do to those that love thy name.” David will not be content with any mercies but saints’ peculiar privileges, and such as accompany salvation. These, these only fit and fill, suit and satisfy the ardent desires of the immortal soul, but other things cannot; for you may as soon fill a sack with wit, as a soul with wealth. Covenant mercies are only proper for immortal souls.

(3.) They differ in their efficacy and operation, in the effects and impressions they leave upon the heart; common mercies never make any better, but many worse. Covenant mercies always improve the subject with whom they lodge abundance; common mercies can no more sanctify, than they can satisfy; a large share of the things of the world hath been a snare to many souls; these things are apt to puff up with pride, to steal the heart from God, to beget carnal confidence and security, which prove the bane of grace, and a bait to sin. They that have tried it, find that it is hard to have worldly honour without vain glory,* to have great estates without a covetous desire, and to swim in worldly pleasures without too much sensual delight. Oh the sad demonstrations we have

* Difficile est esse in honore sine tumore.—*Bern.*

had of the truth of this ! How may the souls of thousands sadly say, the world hath undone them ! Its syren songs have bewitched the credulous, and unwary ; the world oftentimes proves a stumbling-block of iniquity that obstructs men in their journey to heaven, and blinds their eyes that they cannot make divine discoveries ; even believers have found, by sad experiment, that outward enjoyments have had a malignant influence upon their spirits ; they were in a better frame when they were poor, than they have been since raised in the world—according to that distich,

Pellitus nunc es, fueras sine veste retentus,
Nudus eras purus, crimen amictus habes.

Well, this is the too, too common effect of common mercies, but covenant mercies always make the soul better. Certainly, sanctifying knowledge, softening grace, the spirit of faith and holiness leave the soul in a gracious frame ; and the privileges of the covenant, reconciliation with God, adoption, justification, assurance, communion with God, always work kindly and evangelically upon the heart ; these are so many silver and silken cords of love to draw and join the soul to God. These mercies are as coals of fire to melt the heart, and make the conscience supple and pliable to the will of God ; he cannot be a wicked man who hath these mercies, and he that hath most of these mercies, is the best ; our perfection consists in the possession and participation of these sure mercies of David. * Outward mercies are occasions of ripening the sins of the wicked and fitting them for hell ; but covenant mercies ripen saints for glory, by filling their souls with

* Dives qui multa possidet, auro onustus ut sordidum marsupium, at qui justus est, bene compositus est et decorus.—*Clem. Alex. Pædag.*

grace, and filling them for God's use both here and hereafter.

(4.) Common mercies and covenant mercies differ in their duration and continuance ; and this is that which is discriminating in this passage—they are called sure mercies, in opposition to those uncertain riches, “ that take to themselves wings and fly away ; alas the fashion of the world passeth away !” * Earthly enjoyments are but of a short continuance—at death they and we must part, but many times they leave us before we leave them, the dreadful example of many thousands in London, in the late astonishing burning, confirms this—they were very rich, and very poor, in a few hours ; many worth thousands in the morning, but before night had not a house to put their heads in. Our eyes have seen and ears have heard how suddenly vast estates have been plucked out of the hands of the surest possessors ; a night may put an end to the rich fool's confident boasting. No man is rich who cannot carry away with him that which he hath. † What we must leave behind us is not ours, but some others ; and this is the certain end of these uncertain enjoyments—that lose them we must, and we know not when nor how ; and what a condition will a poor worldling be in, when his god and he must be parted ! But now these mercies of the covenant are lasting, yea, everlasting mercies—they continue even beyond this transitory life, and run parallel with the life of God, and the line of eternity—eternal life is in the rear of spiritual life ; grace ends in glory ; yea, an immortal crown is one of the mercies of this sure covenant. These form a treasure that is neither subject to inward decays nor out-

* 1 Tim. vi. 7. 1 Cor. vii. 31.

† Nemo dives est, qui, quod habet, secum hinc auferre non potest.—*Ambros.*

ward violence, "no moth can corrupt it, nor thief steal it."—Matt. vi. 19, 20.

Well, then, since this is the vast difference betwixt common and covenant mercies, why should we make so great account of the former, and so little of the latter? What need have we to advance our hearts and eyes to things that are not seen with bodily eyes, and not dote upon things that are seen? * Our souls should decide with brave Luther, † who said, "I earnestly protested I would not be put off with these things." Alas, what poor things are outward enjoyments! Consider the differences mentioned. God may hate you though you abound with worldly comforts, but covenant mercies are infallible tokens of God's love. The former gifts are not suitable and satisfying to the soul, the latter are; outward mercies will make you no better in the eyes of God or good men, but spiritual will render you truly good. The world will take its sudden farewell of you and fail you at your greatest need; covenant mercies will stand by you while you live, and bring you blameless before the divine throne in eternal glory; here will come in that usual distinction of *bona throni* and *bona scabelli*. It is these covenant mercies that are the good things of the throne; outward mercies are but the good things of the footstool. Let heaven-born souls mount up to the mercies of the throne, but let the moon and all sublunary enjoyments be under their feet; ; the whole world is too little for the godly man—not but that we should be thankful for the least common mercy: but we should not be put off with the greatest—a little of the world should content a Christian with God—all the world should not content him without God. O how sweet are common

* 2 Cor. iv. 18.

† Valde protestatus sum me istis non satiari.

mercies when they come to us in a covenant way ! a morsel coming from the hands of Christ as our mediator, hath a delicate relish ; his mediation only takes away the poison, venom, and malignity, that guilt hath brought upon the creature, and reduceth all things to their pristine usefulness, and primitive perfection. O the happiness of the saints ! they have all they do enjoy as so many tokens of love ; as it is said of the kiss of Cyrus, given to Chrysantas, that it was better than the costly cup of gold which he gave to Artabarus. So common mercies perfumed with covenant love, are transcendently better than the richest treasures of wretched worldlings.

3. Another inference is this, if covenant mercies be thus sure, then it instructs us in the precedency of grace above gifts.* There are gifts of illumination, conviction, interpretation, elocution, prayer, prophecy, which are given for the church's edification ; the main difference betwixt gifts and grace is that the former may languish, vanish and utterly perish, but grace never totally and finally decays. God may give Saul a spirit of government, Judas a gift of preaching and miracles, Simon Magus a temporary faith, and yet repent him of these and pluck them quite away. He may, and often doth, dry up the right arm of an idol, idle shepherd, and darken his right eye of knowledge, Zech. xi. 17, so that he who improves not talents or gifts, "from him shall be taken away that which he hath," even real gifts and appearances of grace : per-

* Gifts come upon other terms than grace, God gives grace as a freehold, it hath the promise of this and another world, but gifts come upon liking, though a father will not cast off his child, yet he may take away his fine coat, and ornaments, if he be proud of them.—*Mr. Gurnal. Christ. Armour.* Matt. xxv. 29. Luke viii. 18.

sons eminently gifted, may be fire-brands of hell. Men may fall from the brightest intellectual attainments, to brutish sensuality; but the gifts and callings of saving grace are without repentance; "God loveth his own to the end," gracious habits shall not be lost. The apostle elegantly expresseth the difference to my hand, 1 Cor. xiii. 8. "Charity," that is, saving grace, "never faileth, but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away." I know the main intent of the place is to commend love above other saving graces, from the duration and perpetuity of it, that it shall continue and be of use in heaven; yet here it is opposed to such gifts as may also be lost in this life—and, therefore, by consequence it will follow, that the one is separable from its subject, the other not. Natural men may make a fair show and flourish with fine gifts, which are, as it were, the trimming and ornament of grace; which, yet may, through negligence or old age decay and wither, true grace may be accompanied with the gildings and varnish of gifts, which may, in time, wear off, whilst a sound principle continues fresh and lively. Besides this, give me leave to add other four differences betwixt common gifts and saving graces.

(1.) They differ in respect of their fountain and spring, the origin from whence they flow. "Gifts," as one saith, "come from God's treasury of bounty, grace proceeds from the choice cabinet of his love." Grace flows to believers through the blood of Christ from God's bowels of tender love, gifts proceed from the hand of God as an act of munificence, upon his Son's glorious ascension and complete inauguration.* It is one thing to eat meat at the king's table, and another

* Ephes. iv. 7.

thing to gather the fruits of royal grace upon some solemn day, as that was of David's, 2 Sam. vi. 19. Saints only have the covenant graces, hypocrites may have a large share in these gifts, nay a larger portion than some saints themselves. Saul, Balaam, Caiphas, may have the gift of prophecy; Judas may preach, but only Thomas and those who are under the influence of grace, can believe, and it is a greater work, saith Luther, to believe, than to work miracles.*

(2.) They differ in their nature and manner of operation. Covenant grace stamps on the soul the image of our heavenly Father, it is the divine nature, God's most curious workmanship, the form and portraiture, the representation and exemplar of God blessed for ever; grace is God's picture, if I may so speak, drawn to the life; it is a forming of Christ in the soul. Now gifts are no such thing—the devil himself hath great gifts, yet hath razed out the image of God; gifts are but the works of God's power and wisdom, such as the sun and stars; yea, even flies and atoms, they are in a sort dead, and we may call them God's lumber; some have noted that gifts are only the effects, but graces are called the fruits of the Spirit; † the one is husk of a common profession, at least, the shell of some rare endowments, but the other is the kernel of sincerity, and fruit of a gospel conversion.

(3.) They differ in their train and retinue, as to gifts none have all, either of all sorts, or any great eminency in all; hence it is said, 1 Cor. xii. 8, 9. “—— to one is given the word of wisdom, to another, knowledge,” &c. Moses had a gift of government, not of eloquence; Paul had a gift of planting, Apollos of watering; some of the apostles were sons of thunder, others of consola-

* *Præstat credere quàm miracula edere.*

† 1 Cor. xii. 11. Gal. v. 22.

tion; some ministers are fitter for opening Scriptures and clearing controversies—others are more for exhortation and conviction of the conscience; some think that pastors and teachers differ with respect to their gifts. But these covenant graces and mercies are linked together, they dance their round in the believing soul, hand in hand, as the word signifies,* 2 Peter i. 5. One grace strengthens another, as stones do in an arch; yea, all graces are radically in faith—some, indeed, have said, that every grace is but faith exercised; however, all graces are infused at once into the soul, though some get the lead as to exercise—the new man is perfect with a perfection of parts, though not of degrees, as it is with a new-born child.

(4.) Gifts and grace differ in their several designs, ends, and effects. Gifts, offices and privileges, are but for others' advantage, and edification; they are given to profit withal.—1 Cor. xii. 7. When Christ ascended, he gave gifts to men—for what end? The apostle tells us “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, Ephes. iv. 8—12. But now the end of grace is the soul's spiritual advantage, that by it Christ may take possession of the heart, that the soul may have some life and principle of opposition to beloved corruptions, and thereby be better helped to perform religious duties, walk with God, improve privileges, and be made meet for heaven. These, and such as these, are the ends of the graces of the covenant. A man may have rare gifts, yet have a base heart; he may have singular endowments, and yet not be helped thereby, to mortify one lust, perform one duty spiritually, or get one step nearer God: but covenant grace is profitable for those great ends and uses; gifts and grace may be said to differ as the sun and moon; the moon casts a light,

* Ἐπιχορηγῆσατε.

indeed, but no heat—but the sun sheds his quickening rays into this lower world—he quickens many things, and maketh all things verdant and fruitful. So doth covenant mercy bring forth many precious things, and divine graces have a lively influence, whereby a man shall both save himself and others, 1 Tim. iv. 16; but a man may have gifts like an angel, and be never the nearer to heaven; he may direct others in the way to heaven, and yet not walk a step therein; he may teach others what he hath not learned himself; he may preach to others and be a castaway.* It is one thing to have the form of knowledge, another to have the power of grace; it is one thing to have angelical gifts, and another thing to have evangelical graces. All gifted persons are not gracious persons; never was any man saved by his gifts, and rarely have they, who have only gifts, been instruments to save others. I dare not say, that it is impossible that a graceless, yet gifted minister, should be a mean of conversion, for God is not to be limited, but it is not ordinary, as common experience testifies.

4. An additional inference is, if covenant mercies be thus sure, then it lets us see the truth of our religion. If the mercies thereof be thus sure, as I have demonstrated, then let us be established in our persuasion of the verity, certainty and infallibility of Christianity; if these be sure mercies, who can doubt of the reality thereof? Every thing in the gospel is made sure, and you may venture your souls upon it; since God hath confirmed these things as a sacred oracle from heaven, who dare dispute them? The God of truth cannot lie nor deny himself; he is so good that he cannot deceive, and so wise that he cannot be deceived.† There is in

* See fully in Rom. ii. 17—24. 1 Cor. ix. 27.

† Divino præcepto innotante obediendum est non disputandum.
Aug.

him neither imprudence in promising, nor inability in performing. "Heaven and earth may pass away, but not one iota of his word shall fail." You are to believe these things without hesitation, and give your full assent to them; as the mystery of godliness is great, so it is without controversy. Grotius * observes that our Christian religion doth transcend all the religions in the world in three things. First, "in the certainty of its maxims;" secondly, "in the spirituality of its precepts;" thirdly, "in the transcendency of its rewards." We have the unerring testimony of heaven for what we believe; which is surer than any logical conclusions, philosophical speculations, yea, or mathematical demonstrations, and I may add, than Old Testament dreams and visions; so the apostle seems to extol God's speaking to us by his Son above the divers manners of his speaking to the Fathers, Heb. i. 1, 2; nay, the apostle Peter asserts that we have in the Scriptures a more sure word of prophecy, than that voice which came to Christ in the holy mount, from the excellent glory, 2 Pet. i. 18, 19; not that any thing can be more sure than the very undoubted words of Jehovah, who is truth itself; but a more sure, that is, most sure, a comparative for a superlative, for the former visions being from God, as well as the prophecies, were themselves as sure as they; but the meaning is, that the Scripture testimony is more sure than that vision, employed as an argument to convince others, or *secundum nos*, for the authority of the Scriptures is beyond the testimony of angels; nay, above the credit that

* Aut hæc admittenda religio, non tantum ob factorum testimonia, de quibus jam egimus, verum etiam ob ea, quæ religioni sunt intrinseca: cum nulla ex omnibus sæculis ac nationibus proferri potest; aut præmio excellentior, præceptis perfectior, aut modo quo propagari jussa est admirabilior.—*Hug. Grot. de Veritat. Relig. Christ. lib. 2, cap. 8, p. 52.* John ix. 32. Acts xxvi. 22, 23. Acts xvii. 11.

might be given to men, for men might suspect Peter and the other apostles, as though this apparition were but a fiction of their own brains—therefore, he appeals to the undoubted prophecies in the Old Testament, which were by long use settled in the hearts of the godly Jews, who believed all that the prophets spake as coming from God; therefore our Saviour declares that they that believe not Moses's writings, will not believe his words, John v. 45—47, and hence it was that they examined doctrines by the prophets; nay our Saviour himself, affirms, “that if they will not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead, Luke xvi. 31, therefore, the apostles had the prophets as patrons of their doctrine, and thence did the faithful fetch a confirmation of the gospel.* The sum of this text is, then, to demonstrate the verity and certainty of the gospel by evidencing the consent of prophetical and apostolical testimony for its fuller confirmation; as if he had said, if you distrust me in commending the evangelical doctrine, I send you back to the prophets, whom, without any exception, you account holy and faithful. These testify of the truth of the gospel, therefore this consent should be evincing and satisfying. Hence it is, that the disciples of Christ have professed such a plephory, † and abundant acquiescence in their persuasion of Christ's being the Messiah and Saviour of mankind; so John vi. 69, “We believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God;” and Simon Peter acknowledged it, Matt. xvi. 16; yea, unbelieving Thomas at last cried out “My Lord, and my God,” John xx. 28, as being overcome with the

* Habebant apostoli prophetas tanquam patronos doctrinæ suæ; fideles quoque inde petebant evangelii confirmationem.—*Calv. in loc. Vide sis Mart. Arct. et cætera in Locum.*

† Full assurance.

clearness of that stupendous, condescending demonstration ; the apostle John testifies, 1 Epist. i. 1, concerning Christ, saying, “ We have heard, seen with our eyes, looked upon, yea, our hands have handled of the word of life ;” and this doth he declare to us from experience of several senses. O what a blessed thing were it to have an undoubted assurance of the certainty of divine things ! O what life would it put into our graces, duties and comforts ! what an antidote would it be against temptations, corruptions and persecutions ! Could we as truly believe the reality of the things of God as corporeal objects, what beauty should we discern therein ! what comfort should we receive therefrom ! what should we not do and endure for them ! Did we see the reality, necessity, and excellency of covenant mercies as we do of common mercies, how should our hearts be enamoured therewith ? They that have the most prevailing persuasion of the certainty and transcendency of heavenly mercies, are the most exact and eminent Christians ; but a faint belief of these things is the cause of sloth ; all irreligion and prophaneness proceeds from a want of an effectual assent to gospel revelations. Alas, there is more atheism and infidelity in the world than we are aware of. Did men as certainly believe there is a heaven and a hell, as they see and know there are stones and trees, earth and water, would not this have a wonderful influence upon their practice ? would they not be other manner of persons than they are ? especially if they did faithfully work upon their hearts the reality of the things of God. Paul and the saints in his days looked not on the things seen, but on things not seen, that is, eternal things, 2 Cor. iv. 18. Moses saw him that was invisible, which made him to endure any thing.—Heb. xi. 27. O Christians, rest not satisfied with a bare conjecture,

but press forward till you arrive at a full assurance, you cannot be too sure in these cases. The apostle hath a mighty full expression, Col. ii. 2, to this purpose ; verse 1, he tells of “ a conflict that he had for them, and the Laodiceans,” that is, a care, fear, and desire ; good man, he was in a heart-rending conflict, an agony. Why, what is the matter ? well, “ it is that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.” Observe the climax, here is,

- (1.) Assurance he desires for them ; then,
- (2.) Full assurance ; further,
- (3.) Riches of full assurance ; yet again,
- (4.) All riches of full assurance ; yea, not a rash and ignorant assurance, but an assurance,
- (5.) Of understanding, that is, with a settled judgment, and not only to have such assurance, and keep it to themselves, but all this
- (6.) To the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, that they may make an open profession of it.

But why was he so earnest for all this, verse 4, “ This I say, or pray for you, lest any man beguile you with enticing words,” as if he had said, you will find all this little enough when a subtle disputer shall set upon you with cunning artifice to draw you from the truth ; you will perhaps feel that you have need of the fullest persuasion that creatures can arrive at, that you may keep your hold, and not be driven away from the hope of the gospel. You little know what storms may assault your faith in the truth of the gospel. Peter made a glorious profession, yet his faith was staggered by a temptation ; and Satan is a cunning sophister—he desires to have

you that he may sift you, and toss you so as to shake away the purest grain of gospel truth ; he will do what he can to cheat you of your religion ; hence it is, that “ Paul was so jealous over the Corinthians with godly jealousy,—— lest by any means, (and he hath store of devices) that as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty ; so their minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.”—2 Cor. xi. 1—3. Hence it is, that teachers have always been so careful to settle and ground their hearers in the certainty of things they taught, as Luke his Theophilus, and Paul his Timothy.* O sirs, get well assured of these things ! Let your faith and persuasion have its full dimensions ; let it be deeply rooted, and high built ; take not things upon trust—let every truth have its complete emphasis and efficacy upon your hearts and consciences, especially the main momentous gospel truths, which you must venture your souls upon, and live and die by. You had need consider what ground you stand upon, and be fully persuaded in your own minds.

CHAP. VIII.

THE SURE MERCIES OF DAVID FURNISH MATERIALS FOR SELF-EXAMINATION.

III. A further use may be suggested, namely, to try us whether we have a real interest in these sure mercies of the covenant ; it is one of the most important questions that we can be asked, whether we have a right title to covenant mercies ? Alas, we have for-

* Luke i. 3, 4. 2 Tim. iii. 14.

feited our title to God, or to any good thing from him, by our breach of the old covenant, and now we have nothing to do with God, except only to endure the severe strokes of his sin-revenging justice. O what need have we to try ourselves by an impartial scrutiny ! For our better assistance in this great and weighty business, I shall a little explain what it is to enter into covenant in general, next inquire what conditions of the new covenant we can find in our hearts, and then shew a little of the nature and effects of these covenant mercies where they exist.

For the first, to enter into covenant with God is to own God as our God, and to give up ourselves wholly to him as his ; expressed in these words in Scripture, “ I will be thy God and thou shalt be my people ”—this, this is the marrow of the covenant, for God to be our God—it is a comprehensive word ; it is *substantia fæderis*, as Funius calls it ; *anima fæderis*, as Pareus calls it ; *caput fæderis*, as Musail—the substance, soul, and head of the covenant ; the life of religion is in this : as one saith sweetly, the goodness of duties lies in adverbs, and the sweetness of the covenant lies in possessives.

Well then, the contracting of this covenant betwixt God and a soul consists chiefly in a mutual surrender, or giving up of themselves to each other, expressed in Scripture by a matrimonial contract, when God gives up himself to the believer, and accepts of him, and the believer accepts of God as his God, and gives up himself to him. Now, we are not left to inquire after the act of God, for it is fully expressed in the Scriptures, and it is certainly supposed God accepts the sinner, when the sinner accepts of God, for these are correlatives, nor is there any change in God, the change is only in the sinner, who is now put into a new state

and relation. It is certain by the free offers of the gospel, that God doth consent, and the main thing to be inquired into is, whether the soul do consent or not? for if it cordially do, the agreement is made, God and the soul are united, which is a thing of the greatest importance in the whole world. I shall purposely wave controversies in this business wherein this consent lies, whether it be only an assent as an act of the understanding, or be a choice as an act of the will, &c. I conceive it is an act of the whole soul, whereby a poor troubled sinner discovering its forlorn estate by its breach of the old covenant, and sad consequences thereof, and discerning a possibility of a recovery and the way of reconciliation by a new covenant formed and contracted betwixt God and fallen man, sealed and confirmed by the blood of the Mediator, God-man, doth freely, cordially, and decidedly accept of God as his chief good and ultimate end, and give up himself to him resolvedly, unreservedly, and universally, to be the Lord's; to be and do what the Lord pleaseth, to obey divine commands, be at God's disposal in life and death, and thus to continue even to the end of his days.

This is for a soul to enter into covenant with the Lord. The trial will lie in these two things: first, whether we have accepted of God as our God? secondly, whether we have given up ourselves to him, to be at his disposal, yea or no? a little on both these.

1. Whether have you taken the Lord to be yours, or not? We are all naturally idolaters and have our hearts glued to the creature, or something else besides God; we are of those many, who cry out, "who will shew us any good?" who trace the whole creation to find satisfaction, till they are weary, and sit down in despair of obtaining what they seek, for all the crea-

* See Mr. Baxt. Saints' Rest, part 1. p. 177, 178.

tures are forced to echo this unanimous confession, Happiness is not in me. Thus, like Hagar,* we wander in this howling wilderness, till the water of hope be spent in the bottle, and our souls, like Ishmael, be ready to perish under the shrubs of guilt and wrath, and then we sit down in sorrow, ready to pine away in our iniquities, loth to see or think of our own damnation, lifting up our voice with bitter weeping and despair. God hears and asks the troubled soul what it ails, and amidst these confusions he creates a blessed spring of hope in this desert state; opens the eyes, enraptures the heart with the glory of gospel grace, draws water of life out of the wells of salvation, and satisfieth the hungry soul with good things; the ransomed sinner is made to own that God thus owns him in a time of need, and to cry out with repenting Israel, "Once, O Lord our God, other lords besides thee have had dominion over us, but by thee only will we make mention of thy name," Isa. xxvi. 13; or with David, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever," Psalm lxxiii. 25, 26; as if the poor soul should say, I have been long seeking contentment here below, but I see by sad experience, all things fail, there is vanity and vexation written upon the sweetest comforts under the moon; I have laid out much labour for that which profits not; I am weary with my disappointments, I will return to my first husband; return unto thy rest, O my soul! God alone is the most, yea, the only, suitable satisfying rest of my wandering and bewildered soul. Let others go a whoring from God to creature dependencies—it is good for me to draw nigh to God; I am undone,

* Gen. xxi. 15—19.

without him ; I am sick of love for him. Woe is me, what shall I do ? If my soul get not an interest in God I faint, I die, I perish. Lord, put me not off without thyself, let nothing take up my heart besides thee ;" let all the pleasures, profits and honours of the world go whither they will, so only I may have my God, I can set God against them all, if God be the portion of mine inheritance, I can say truly, " the lines are fallen to me in pleasant places, I have a goodly heritage," * I can bid defiance to all the world to make me miserable ; when all the world looks black about me, and all my comforts forsake me, when seeming friends scorn me, and open enemies pursue me with cruel hatred ; I can then encourage myself in the Lord my God ; yea, rejoice in the Lord ; should even the whole creation crack about my ears, the earth tremble, and the heavens be rolled together as a scroll ; I know that my Redeemer lives and I shall live with him in joy and blessedness for ever. These, or the like, are the musings of the humble, sensible sinner, and though he cannot say the Lord is his, yet, he can say through grace, that it is the desire of his soul to have the Lord for his God, he looks upon that as the happiest estate that a creature is capable of, and if God should say this house or land, and these goods, or this kingdom, or this world, are thine, except he say withal, I am thine, the soul goes away disconsolate, and looks on all those things as nothing worth.

Christians, try yourselves, hath it been thus with you, or hath it not ? What settled, prevailing esteem hath the God of heaven in your hearts ? Do you look upon all the bravery and delights of the world but as straw and mire under your feet in comparison of your God ? Do your hearts pant after the living God ? Do

* Psalm xvi. 5, 6.

your souls desire him in the night? Can you boast of your God, and challenge all the world, and say, there is none like unto our God? Can you depend upon him, and cast all your care on him? Do you, in all things, give him the preeminence? Are your hearts endeared to, and enamoured with this glorious, gracious God? But,

I proceed to ask, have you given yourselves up to him? for if you be the Lord's you are not your own, you have wholly resigned up yourselves to him;* you have given him the keys of your hearts, and delivered him possession of your souls, as the only rightful owner thereof; just as the wife gives up her all to her husband, so that "she hath not power of her own body, but her husband;"† so do believers surrender themselves unto the spiritual husband of the church, so that now they have nothing to dispose of without leave; house, land, money, estates, relations, name, time, gifts of mind, members of the body, faculties of soul, life itself, and all they have and do are at God's disposal, and they lay them all at his feet, and dare not dispose of one penny in their purse, or minute of time, or cast of the eye, or thought of the heart, with their good will, but by his permission. Hence, you will hear a believer inquiring with respect to sin and duty, and making conscience of compliance with the Lord's will and pleasure. The Scripture calls this a giving ourselves to the Lord, 2 Cor. viii. 5; yea, there are several outward symbols to evidence it, Isa. xlv. 5, "One shall say I am the Lord's, and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob, and another shall subscribe with his hand to the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel." Profession, subscription, denomination, nay, though it be to endure the scorn of

* 1 Cor. vi. 19.

† 1 Cor. vii. 4.

a reproachful name, any thing would he do, or undergo, so he might be ranked amongst real saints, and be indeed the Lord's.

And there are four properties of the soul's self-surrender to God. A covenanting soul gives up itself to God these four ways, that is to say,

Really, readily, resolvedly and unreservedly.

(1.) Really, truly, sincerely, without the ordinary, counterfeiting and complimenting expressions common in the world. It is easy, as it is customary, for men to court others with that empty ceremony, Your servant, sir, when they never think as they speak. This, by the way, is to be ranked, at least, among idle words, of which, I fear, many have a sad account to give. Let professors learn better manners and language than to conform herein to the world; well, but a saint's giving up himself to the Lord, is not complimentary, but real. Hear holy David, you shall find him in good earnest, Psal. cxvi. 16, "O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid, thou hast loosed my bonds." Here is,

[i.] An asseveration, "truly."

[ii.] An affirmation, "I am thine."

[iii.] A reduplication, "I am thy servant, I am thy servant."

[iv.] A confirmation by two arguments.

First, "He was his servant by his birth, being born in his house," for if a woman was servant in a house, all the children she bore there were servants to the master of that house. Hence, saith David, "the son of thine handmaid."

Secondly, David was God's by redemption, "thou hast loosed my bonds," for such as delivered any from captivity, had them to be their servants for ever. Thus every genuine believer really professeth himself to be the

Lord's, he is God's bought and devoted servant, he doth, as the servant of old, plainly say, "I love my master, I will not go out," and so is brought to the door-post, and hath his ear bored through with an awl, he receives an ear mark, being subjected to the operation of the blessed Spirit of God, and so made willing and obedient to the Lord's calls.* This engageth him to be much in desiring to know the Lord's will with a resolution to do it; he stops not his ear, he hides not his eyes from his master's commands, but prays as David, Psalm cxix. 125, "I am thy servant, give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies;" a good man would not be ignorant of any part of his work, because he is a real servant, and makes conscience of upright obedience. Ah sirs, what say your hearts to this? are you in good earnest? do you, indeed, speak as you think, and will you do accordingly? It is no jesting, trifling matter. Israel gave God good words; so that God saith, they have well spoken, when they promised to be the Lord's and to obey him, but God adds, "O that there were such a heart in them that they would fear me," &c.—Deut. v. 28, 29. Alas, persons may say fair, in a glow of affection, but inquire you into the frame of your spirits and actions whether they be of a genuine description.

(2.) This self-surrender to God is ready, free, willing, and cheerful, not with grumbling, and by compulsion. When persons do it because they cannot help it, when they see they must die, and can serve the devil no longer, or when they are under the rod, they will assume the appearance of being religious; but it is full sore against their wills, for they would rather choose to be slaves to their passions. They are, however, forced on by violence or constraint, or else they lie under such

* See Exod. xxi. 5—6.

terrors and convictions, that for the present they are overawed, and dare not but profess to be the Lord's. It is strangers that yield feigned or forced obedience to our David.* But the Lord's true hearted subjects shall be a willing people in the day of his power, Psalm cx. 3, voluntariness or liberalities, so the word signifies: they are all volunteers, and look upon it as their privilege, honour and happiness to be the Lord's servants, as the good emperor Theodosius, who accounted it a greater honour to be the subject of Christ, than to be emperor of the world. Real Christians are like the governors of Israel, † that offered themselves willingly among the people; these have God's heart, since the Lord hath their heart. Those in Acts ii. 41, gladly received the word, and so were baptized; every child of God is a free-will offering, and presents his soul and body as a living sacrifice, ‡ or *holocaust*, and this is acceptable to God. O the account that God makes of these! they are called princes of the people. In Psalm xlvii. 9, the margin hath it, the voluntary of the people; || the volunteers are princes, as indeed all God's saints are kings, and the church hath her princes in all the earth, § because they have power over their base stubborn wills, which is more than to rule over millions of men; they are persons of most noble, generous, and ingenuous spirits—others, are of a low, base, sordid, degenerate disposition, that have not subjected themselves to God, but are slaves to their lusts. Well, sirs, how is it with you? do you voluntarily, and cheerfully surrender yourselves to the Lord, as the bride doth in marriage? Are your hearts so gone after the Lord, as to look upon it as your greatest

* Psalm xviii. 44. See Marg. † Judg. v. 9. ‡ Rom. xii. 1.

|| נדיבי עמים

§ Psal. xlv. 16.

preferment, to give yourselves up to him as the husband of the church? Have you seriously deliberated on things in your breasts; and upon mature thoughts concluded that this is the best engagement you can make? Doth your soul make you like “the chariots of Amminadib,”* or a willing people? and the longer you serve this master, the better do you like this service? You do not repent that you gave up your names to him; if it were to do again, would you not do it, though you knew of ten thousand times more troubles in your way than yet you have met with? nay, do you not thank God heartily, that he will accept of your persons and services, and look upon his service as perfect freedom? Is it thus with you? Bless God that he hath shown you distinguishing favour.

(3.) The believer delivers up himself to God resolvedly. There are some that halt between two opinions, that are off and on; one while they will be for God, another while they are staggering like the Samaritans; when the Jews were in prosperity, they would profess to be of their stock—when in adversity, they disowned relation to them. These are a cake not turned, the one side baked for God, the other side dough, † so that one cannot tell what to make of them. God likes not these unfixed, unresolved spirits; but a real saint will attach himself to God whatever it cost him. Carnal friends, that go about to hinder him, say nothing effectual, he will make this agreement in spite of all opposition, they may set their hearts at rest; there is no dissuading him, for his affections are placed; no bonds can hold him, he cleaves to the Lord with full purpose of heart, he hath devoted himself to God’s fear—there is no revocation; ‡ all the devils in hell, and men on

* Cant. vi. 12.

† Hos. vii. 8.

‡ Acts xi. 23. Psalm cxix.

earth, shall not obstruct him in his course and progress to the Lord, "if my father hung about my neck," saith an ancient, "my wife and children stood in my way, to my dearly beloved, I would cast off my father, and push away my wife and my children that I may enjoy my Lord God." Offer a resolved soul, house, lands, pleasures, treasures, they all signify nothing if they be to hire him from Christ. "Let their money perish with them," said a noble Marquis, "that esteem all the money in the world worth one hour's communion with Jesus Christ." Consider Moses and Paul, the first forsook the pleasures of Pharaoh's court for Christ; the latter accounted not his life dear in the cause of Christ;* and, indeed, this is the great condition upon which only we can have an interest in him, Luke xiv. 26, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, mother, wife, children, brethren, sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple;" that is, when these stand in competition with Christ, or when he cannot keep both, "if he be not willing to part with these rather than want Christ, he is not worthy of him," as another evangelist hath it.† Ah sirs, how is it with you? are you at a point? do you hang no longer in suspense? will you receive Christ upon his own proposed terms? and will you receive him now, and not delay a moment longer? do you say that upon due considering your ways, "you make haste and will not delay, to give up yourselves to the Lord? are your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace," that is, with a holy resolution to go through the sharpest paths to the beloved of your souls? You care not what befalls you, so that this dreadful evil do not befall you to be without God in the world, and many waters of

* Heb. xi. 24, 25. Acts xx. 24.

† Matt. x. 37.

‡ Psal. cxix. 59, 60. Eph. vi. 15.

opposition cannot quench this flame of love to your dearest Lord. Try yourselves by this criterion.

(4.) A gracious soul delivers up itself to God, unreservedly, entirely, and universally, and that both with reference to the subject, and the season ; the whole soul, and that for ever, wholly and finally.

[i.] The whole soul is given up to God in this covenant agreement ; here do hypocrites dodge, and article, and make reserves, and come not off fair, but leave some fort of the heart for an appetite or passion, and are not willing to give up themselves entirely ; now God will have all the heart, or none at all—he will not brook a rival or competitor, “ my son give me thy heart,” and, indeed, the whole soul is a present little enough for the God of heaven ; it is a whorish heart that is for dividing. A gracious soul saith, let him have all, as it cannot be content with half a Saviour, so it knows, God will not be content with half a heart, and therefore, cries out, Lord, here I am a poor worm, I have polluted myself with sin, and deserve not that ever thou shouldest own such a wretch as I am ; yet, such as I am, I here offer myself wholly to thee. Alas, I am but a poor and sorry offering for so great a king, yet I freely give myself to thee, entreating thee to make me better ; I cannot bestow myself on one that either hath more right to me, or can do more for me ; here I am, Lord, I am only thine and wholly thine ; take me as thine, and make me less mine own, and that will be my happiness, and I shall be fitter for thy service ; I dare not part stakes betwixt thyself and any other, for I see, I cannot serve two contrary masters ; I will not give my faculties or members any more as instruments of unrighteousness. Chain my soul to thee, unite my heart to fear thy name. This, or such like, is the language of a believing soul, and there can be no covenant

without this entireness and complete resignation. Hence are these multitudes of expressions that call for “ seeking God with the whole heart, and loving God with all the heart, soul, &c. and serving God with all the heart, * yea, this is the sum of all that God requires of us.—Deut. x. 12. O examine, then, hath the Spirit of God beat down every strong hold and vain imagination; and brought over your hearts wholly to the Lord? What say you, is every nook and creek of your hearts delivered up to this great and mighty conqueror? Is there no creature comfort, or sensual pleasure that hath stolen away your hearts from your divine Lord? Deal faithfully with your souls on this behalf, there is no dallying with the searcher of your hearts.

[ii.] Have you given up your hearts and selves irrevocably, irreversibly, finally? There is no playing fast and loose with the great God; you must not give and take again, that is fool’s play; but you must be for ever the Lord’s, all your days devote yourselves to keep his commandments unto the end, not like some servants that will keep to their masters as long as they like, or while they please them; but this is a boring through the ear to be the Lord’s servants for ever; it is a marriage that lasts for the term of life, “ I will call upon him,” saith David, “ as long as I live.”—Psalm cxvi. 2. It is the hollow-hearted hypocrite that ends his religion before he have ended his days, that puts his hand to the plough and looks back, that falls off when tribulation comes; but a covenanting spirit is a constant spirit. “ Whose house are we,” saith the apostle, “ if we hold fast the confidence, and the rejoicing of the hope firmly unto the end,” Heb. iii. 6; it is the end that crowns the action. Solomon saith, “ the end of a thing is better than the beginning.” Christ saith,

* Deut. iv. 29, and vi. 5.

“ if ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed,” John viii. 31, and many Scriptures * make this a condition, without which, there can be no salvation ; and though the end is not yet come, yet is it the desire and design of your souls to pray, and read, and serve God all your days? You do not, you dare not set bounds or limits to your obedience ; but say as David, Psalm lxxi. 14, “ I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more,” as if he had said, I am so far from casting away my hope and faith that I will continue, yea, and increase in the exercises of religion. Do you resolve with David, to “ keep God’s law continually, yea, for ever and ever,” Psalm cxix. 44, and pray still for supporting grace, verse 117, using all the rest of God’s appointed means for your perseverance to the end ?

Thus I have dispatched this part of the examination, which is general, to try whether we be entered into covenant with God by reciprocal acts of giving and receiving ; whether you have taken God for your God, and given up yourselves to him, as believers are wont to do.

More particularly, I entreat you to inquire into the conditions of the new covenant, or the graces and dispositions promised therein, and lay your hand on your heart, and inquire, whether they be really in you? such as these,

1. I told you saving illumination is one important covenant condition. † Hath the Lord discovered to you the great and good things of his gospel? opened to you his blessed treasury, and anointed your eyes to behold all things in their lively colours? Have you got a clear discovery of the nature of sin and duty, misery and mercy, the creatures’ vanity and Christ’s

* Col. i. 23. 1 Tim. iv. 16. Jam. i. 25. † Jer. xxxi. 34.

beauty and excellency? Have you with an eagle eye pierced into deep gospel mysteries? This is not a brain knowledge, consisting in notions, but an experimental spiritual acquaintance with the things of God, impressing the soul with the sense thereof, and leading it into the life and spirit of Scripture truths; so that a Christian now sees divine things after another manner than he ever did before, and is led into all truth by the blessed Spirit. God promiseth that "all the children of the church shall be taught of God," Isa. liv. 13, which Scripture our Saviour doth cite and interpret, John vi. 45, of believing or coming to God, "every one, therefore, that hath heard and learned of the Father, cometh unto me." Ah Christians, have you learned this choice gospel lesson of going out of yourselves, and closing with Christ, unconditionally, upon pure gospel terms? This is the great lesson of the gospel, have you learned it? You are dunces, and deserve to be kicked out of Christ's school, unless you have learned this great and important lesson; besides, God teacheth many other lessons, as to hate sin, love God, and holiness, and to love God's children. Hence saith blessed Paul, 1 Thess. iv. 9, "as touching brotherly love; ye need not that I write unto you, for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another." This divine nature prompteth believers to this; they cannot do otherwise except they put off their very nature, for a Christian may find his heart secretly and sensibly carried out to all things and persons that have the impress and image of God, as the very name and the common nature of a brother is potent and prevalent to attract the affections: the truth is, he hath his chair in heaven who thus teacheth hearts—and if God be the teacher, he makes apt and

able, active and notable scholars.* O Christians, see and try your learning, ascertain who is your master.

2. Another disposition like this, or indeed, a fruit of the former, is God's writing his law in the hearts of men, "he promiseth to put his law into their inward parts, and write it in their hearts,"† so that as tally answers to tally, indenture to indenture, face to face, so the heart of the Christian will echo and answer to the word of God; and he will feel something within his own bosom, that joins issue with the word without; so that he can now say with Paul, I consent to the law that it is good;‡ whatever I be, the commandment is holy, just, and good. A carnal heart riseth up in rebellion against the word, and secretly loathes a spiritual command, and could wish it even razed out of the Bible, that it might sin more freely; but a gracious soul loves that word best, which restrains corruption most, and binds it closest in new obedience; hence saith David, "thy word is very pure, therefore, thy servant loves it," Psalm cxix. 140; the stricter the word is, the better I love it; I would have the law of God restrain the exorbitancies of my heart and life, it doth me good to be kept in, for I have a wild and wayward heart. || O how glad am I of a word that searcheth, curbeth, and cutteth off my exuberant branches, I willingly fall under it and bless God for it, as one of the greatest mercies of my life. Can you say thus? When

* *Cathedram habet in cœlis qui corda docet; quando Deus est magister quàm cito docetur, quod docetur.—Aug.*

† Jer. xxxi. 33. Heb. viii. 10. x. 16.

‡ Rom. vii. 12—16.

|| *Præsta ei cor tuum molle et tractabile et custodi figuram quâ te figuravit artifex, habens in temetipso humorem, ne induratus—amittas vestigia digitorum ejus.—Iren. advers. Hær. lib. 4. prop. fin.*

there is a controversy betwixt a pinching word and a repining lust, whether of them do you vote for? which do you give your voice for, and plead on the behalf of? Can you not take God's part, and his word's part, against a naughty, deceitful heart? or do you pick quarrels with the statutes of heaven when you should obey them? Ah sirs, try yourselves in this, and if you find that you have a counterpart of God's word within you, a transcript of this blessed copy in your hearts, then are you within the covenant.

3. God promiseth to give his people in covenant with him, "one heart and one way," Jer. xxxii. 39; this imports both a oneness of heart within itself, and also, a oneness of heart with other saints; before conversion the heart was divided and distracted betwixt various objects; God must have part, Satan part, sin part, and the world another part of the heart; but now the soul gives itself wholly to God, as I have explained; hence David prays, "unite my heart to fear thy name,"* or make my heart one; a real saint is fully, entirely, universally given up to God; but of this, I have spoken before: likewise the covenant of grace makes Christians unanimous; hence it is, that as soon as souls have given themselves to God, they essay to join themselves to their fraternity, and unite with the society of sincere believers; † hence the primitive saints "were together with one accord;" ‡ yea, they were "of one heart, and of one soul;" || as the curtains of the tabernacle were coupled with loops, so were Christians with love; hence you hear so often mention made of fellowship in the gospel, and God's children are compared to a building fitly framed together, by

* Psalm lxxxvi. 11.

† Acts ix. 26.

‡ Acts ii. 46.

|| Acts iv. 32.

the cement of the Spirit ; * yea, to members of the body, with relation to the head, † from whom, that is, Christ, the whole body is fitly joined together, and compacted.—Ephes. iv. 16. Well then, sirs, are you united and become one with the rest of the saints, though you cannot attain to a oneness in judgment in every lesser truth about discipline, &c. yet, are you one with them in heart and affection? yea, of one judgment and way with them, in main, material points of doctrine and practice, having “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace?” ‡ cannot you say to others, “come, let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant, that shall not be forgotten?” || Are not your hearts glad when you see any come in, and worship the Lord? How stand your hearts affected towards such as fear God? Are you of one heart with them? can you cheerfully walk in one way with them as your dearest companions? is your chief content in these truly excellent ones? Then you are among the covenant people of God.

4. The fear of God, is a gracious disposition promised to new covenant converts, Jer. xxxii. 40, “I will,” saith God,” “put my fear in their hearts that they shall not depart from me.” This fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, § and it is often put for all religion; it is a holy, reverential awfulness wrought in a believer’s heart, whereby through a serious sense of his glorious majesty, and tender mercy, the soul is afraid to offend God, and careful to please him, as a child is his father, by a conscientious obedience to all God’s commands. I cannot stand to enlarge on this fully, but

* Phil. i. 5. Eph. ii. 21.

† Col. ii. 19.

‡ Eph. iv. 3—5.

|| Jer. l. 4, 5.

§ Job xxviii. 28.

will bring you to the test. Christians, doth the fear of God possess and seize upon your spirits? doth it make you “men of truth, hating covetousness?” doth it engage your souls to serve him “with reverence and godly fear?” doth it make you afraid of his threatenings, fearful to offend him, careful to please him? do you worship him “in his fear?” doth it make you run to him “as your hope and confidence?” are your souls in the fear of the Lord “all the day long?” doth the fear of God cast out the slavish fear of men? doth it make you work out your salvation with fear and trembling? doth it make you tremble at his word, and willing to obey the voice of his servants? doth it keep you humble and self-denying, instead of being proud and high-minded? do you fear God and give glory to him on seeing his works? in a word, do you fear God and work righteousness, fear God and hate wickedness? * Is it thus with your souls. Lay your hand upon your heart, and seriously answer these questions. I know you will all say you have the fear of God; but whether hath it these evidences? and, one word more, whence springs this fear of God? doth it flow not only from the apprehension of God’s majesty and strict justice, but from the sense of his free grace and goodness? so God saith, in Hos. iii. 5, “they shall fear the Lord and his goodness;” so saith David, Psalm cxxx. 4, there is mercy with thee that thou mayest be feared.” O this is a kindly operation, when the sense of God’s love awes the soul to obedience, and works upon it tenderness of conscience, that it can say, I dare not grieve so good a God, or offend so loving a father, who never

* Exod. xviii. 21. Heb. xii. 28. Prov. iii. 7. Psalm v. 7. Prov. xiv. 26. Prov. xxiii. 17. Matt. x. 28. Phil. ii. 12. Isaiah lxvi. 2. Isaiah l. 11. Rom. xi. 20. Rev. xiv. 7. Acts x. 35. Prov. xiv. 16.

did me hurt, who is always doing me good—shall I render evil for good? God forbid. This is child-like and ingenuous, and doth demonstrate a covenant relation.

5. Sanctification is another covenant promise, Ezek. xxxvi. 25, “then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you.” This is a gracious disposition, what can you say to it? not that the soul in this life can be free from the remainders of corruption; for “what is man, that he should be clean? but the power, strength and dominion of sin is crushed in a covenanted soul; so that it may be truly said of the regenerate, that he hath “a clean heart, and clean hands;” and Christ said, “his disciples were clean, all except Judas.” Well, then, hath the good word of God made you holy, and cleansed your hearts? do you desire to make clean “the inside of the cup, as well as outside?” I mean, do you cleanse yourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, resolving “to perfect holiness in the fear of God?” are you growing stronger and stronger? He that hath clean hands doth renew his strength. Are you washed from your idols, that is, the sins to which you are most addicted, and keep yourselves from your own iniquity? can you say you hate every false way? can you cut off a right-hand sin, pluck out a right-eye sin, though never so dear and useful, pleasant and profitable? do you resist and conquer, in some measure, your master lusts? so that you can say, that through grace, sin hath not dominion over you, though you feel to your cost it hath possession in you. Can you say you are prepared for duties and ordinances, though you be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary? doth faith in God’s promises purify your hearts? do you cleanse your ways by

observing Scripture precepts? do you pray hard, for a clean heart as well as a clear state? * O sirs, try yourselves in these things, unless you be sanctified you are not justified, many are undone through self-deceit—in this case, Solomon saith, there is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, yet are not cleansed from their filthiness, Prov. xxx. 12. Take heed of this, and labour to evidence your justification by your sanctification.

6. Another gracious effect of the new covenant is, “a new heart, and a new spirit,” Ezek. xxxvi. 26. This is a holy disposition, a habit of grace, the image of God, the divine nature strangely changing, altering, metamorphosing the soul, casting it into a new mould, and turning the stream and current of the soul’s emotions and affections into another channel, to a compliance with God’s will, and a tendency towards heaven, and the things of heaven. This is a wonderful act and fruit of God’s “free grace,” and “sanctifying Spirit;” and O what a change doth it produce in the heart and life! not only a mental change, to have the mind furnished with some general truths in a notional way; so that whereas previously a man was sunk in ignorance, now he is grown a knowing person, and learned discourser or disputant; nor is it only a moral change, whereby a man, formerly a notorious offender, is grown a respectable member of society; nor yet a formal change, by which a careless neglecter is become a constant performer of religious duties, which is good so far, yet no more than a hypocrite may do, Simon Magus believes, Herod doth many things, Ahab fasts, Judas can pray and preach; but the new creature goes beyond them all, for it

* Job xv. 14. Psalm xxiv. 4. John xiii. 10. John xv. 3. 2 Cor. vii. 1. Job xvii. 9. Psalm xviii. 23. Rom. vi. 14. 2 Chron. xxx. 19. Acts. xv. 9. Psalm cxix. 9. Psalm li. 10.

is a cordial, spiritual, evangelical change of the whole man to what is good; so that now the soul hath new emotions, actions, and conversation, a new rule, a new principle, a new end, new affections and delights, a new light and life, new heat and strength, new companions and acquaintance, new griefs, fears, burdens, hopes, hatred, desires, and expectations, “old things are past away, and behold, all things are become new;” so that it may well be called a new creation, 2 Cor. v. 17. Christians, try yourselves in this—what work of God hath passed upon your souls? have you a new heart? are you made holy as God is holy? doth this new heart hate and expel sin? doth it close with real saints as saints? doth it breathe after grace in the souls of relations and neighbours? doth it make you sensible of the smileings and hidings of God’s face? doth it raise your hearts to heavenly objects and delights? doth grace in some measure grow, thrive, increase, and come on in your souls? do you worship God in a spiritual manner, and long for communion with him here, and in heaven?

7. A soft heart is promised in the new covenant, Ezek. xxxvi. 26, “I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh,” that is, a soft, broken and tender heart, a flexible, pliant, and melting disposition; not so much the eyes pouring floods of tears, for that may proceed from a natural constitution, but a soul grieved for sin, as offence against God, which, in the sinner’s account and estimation, he looks upon as the greatest evil, and worse than the worst affliction; and, if it were to do again, he would rather be torn to pieces, than willingly commit such sin—he would give all the world, if in his power, that it were undone again; and, therefore, it is that the Scripture rather expresseth it by mourning than by weeping, for weeping is a passionate act of the outward

senses and excitable faculties, and it may be desirable to give vent to inward sorrow by outward tears, but mourning is a contrition and compunction of heart for sin, as dishonouring God, grieving his Spirit, crucifying his Son, and violating his holy and righteous law. Well, then, have you soft and tender hearts? that is, can you lay to heart your sins as the greatest evils that ever befel you? can you justify God if he should condemn you? can you condemn yourselves as worthy to be condemned to hell for ever? do you loathe yourselves for all your abominations? can you wish you had been upon the rack when you committed such sins? are you weary and heavy laden with the intolerable burden of guilt? and what would you give or lose to have it taken off? is your heart sensible of the absolute need you have of Jesus Christ? are you soft and pliable to God's holy will, attentive to divine suggestions, retentive of divine impressions? doth the least hint of God's mind find in you an observant spirit? when God saith, "seek my face," doth your heart readily echo, "thy face, Lord, will I seek?" do your souls tremble under a sense of threatenings and judgments? does a consideration of God's loving kindness melt and attract your heart? doth this strongly lead and draw you to repentance? Ask your own souls such questions as these, whereby you may know whether you have this condition and disposition of the gospel covenant.

8. The last disposition that is promised in the new covenant, as a singular mercy, is holy practice, or spiritual obedience; so Ezek. xxxvi. 27, "I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them." This is a holy, watchful, cheerful, faithful, fruitful

obedience to divine precepts and commands.* So, then, let me question you thus: do you run the ways of God's commandments with enlarged hearts? do you follow God fully, and walk with him uprightly? do you delight to do God's will, and in all things mind your rule? doth the mind of God move you more than the customs and traditions of men? though you cannot say you do exactly keep, yet cannot you say you have respect to, all God's commandments? are you like the centurion's servants, ready to go or come at God's bidding? doth the authority of a divine command more awe your conscience to obedience, than the examples of the most or the best of men? do you with Zechariah and Elizabeth walk in all the ways of God's commandments blameless? do you take heed to your ways that you offend not with tongue or hand or foot? do you worship God in the beauty of holiness? do you make it your business to engage your hearts in your approaches to God? do you lift up your hearts in God's ways, that he and you may meet? do you worship God in the spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, not having any confidence in the flesh? Let me ask further, do you gladly follow Christ's example, study conformity to him, and communion with him? is faith working by love? and doth that love engage you to keep God's commands, and render them not grievous but pleasant? do you account Christ's yoke easy, his burden light, and his service perfect freedom? and are you constant and permanent in holy walking every day? and though you may stumble and fall, or turn aside, or stand still, or turn back, yet you

* Si ergo talis fuerit vita nostra, ita omnibus membris quadrata et composita ut universi motus nostri secundum Dei leges agantur, vere testamentum Dei erit super carnem nostram.—*Orig. Hom. 3. in cap. 17.*

dare not quit and forsake God's ways or choose the ways of sin, to go aside with the workers of iniquity; but you lament your miscarriages, are restless till you get into God's ways again, plead hard for pardon, are more jealous over your hearts, make more haste God-wards, and so through grace keep faithful, that at death you may receive a crown of life.

Thus I have gleaned up the conditions or dispositions of God's children which are promised by God, merited by Christ, and effectually wrought in their hearts by the blessed Spirit, and these are the mercies of the covenant, by which you may try whether you be interested in it; for if you find these new covenant mercies in you, you may conclude you have an interest in new covenant privileges.

Another way of trial, which I shall but briefly hint at, is to discover the influence and effects of new covenant mercies, upon the souls of such as partake of them; that is, such benefits and privileges of the covenant, as reconciliation, adoption, remission of sin, imputation of Christ's righteousness, and others before-mentioned. These have a gracious influence upon the heart. Take a specimen:

1. They are transforming and conforming mercies; they change heart and life, as I have said before; they make a person argue from mercy to duty; he that partakes of these mercies, dares not sin that grace may abound, nor argue from mercy to sinful liberty, much less make christian liberty a cloak of lasciviousness; oh no, that is the devil's logic—a child of God thinks and thus reasons: did Christ die for me, and shall not I die unto sin, and live unto him that died for me? shall my dear Saviour shed his blood for me, and shall I think any thing too dear for him? shall he forgive

much to me, and shall I not give all I have to him? shall not I love him much? pray much? obey much? O my soul, how canst thou choose but live in new obedience? doth not the love of Christ constrain thee? hath he reconciled thee to God, and God to thee, and wilt not thou be reconciled to thy offending brother? hath he forgiven thee ten thousand talents, gratis, and wilt not thou forgive such as offend thee a few farthings, for Christ's sake? hath God given thee himself, and dost thou withhold any part of thy poor, silly, sorry self from him? nay, here I am, let him work in me, and do with me as seems good in his eyes.

2. They are cheering, comforting and refreshing mercies; these mercies of the covenant will answer all objections, clear all scores, and put the soul out of doubt concerning its state. Let the devil and an unbelieving heart conspire together to torment the conscience, yet one word of the blessed covenant will baffle all their arguings, and stop their mouths, and still the soul; let God speak out and say, I am thy God in covenant, who then can cause trouble? this was all David's salvation, desire, and consolation. One drop of this holy oil of the covenant will sweeten a whole fountain and sea of the bitter waters of the sharpest afflictions; a taste of the covenant will turn water into wine; this is the tree cast into the bitter waters of Marah, that makes them sweet; sense of pardon takes away the sense of pain;* if a particular promise can so comfort the soul, that it may be called a cordial, O what comfort will the covenant afford, which is a cluster and constellation of evangelical promises! the good things of the new covenant keep the head above water, and the heart above terror in all

* Isaiah xxxiii. 24.

conditions: these steel the soul with courage in difficulties, comfort in adversity, and are an antidote in prosperity.

3. These mercies of the covenant are reviving and elevating mercies. They lift the heart above the world, and advance it to divine celestial objects and conceptions: a Christian thus clothed with the sun, hath the moon under his feet, and all sublunary enjoyments at his heels; * Christ and things above lie next his heart; † other things are dross and dung in comparison thereof; ‡ a covenanted Christian's treasure is in heaven, and his heart is there; he prefers a grain of grace to all the comforts of the world; common mercies will not content his heart, nor quiet his conscience; he opens his heaven-born soul to heavenly influences; he can easily wink all the bravery of this lower world into blackness and deformity, and pity the sottish senseless sons of men that take up their rest below, and neglect the main concernments of eternity. Ah, thinks the gracious soul, what fools are these that chase these gilded vanities, and pant after the dust of the earth! would to God that they did but see with such enlightened eyes as God's Spirit hath given me. O that they did but taste the sweetness of that grace which my soul is enamoured with, they would thirst after the world no more, but long for God, yea this living, loving God, and never be content till they come to appear before him. How blessed are they that have their sins pardoned, their hearts purged, their souls reconciled! that have God for their portion, and heaven for their inheritance and eternal home!

4. The mercies of the covenant are growing and increasing mercies; the Christian that hath them is like the house of David, that "waxed stronger and

* Rev. xii. 1.

† Col. iii. 1.

‡ Phil. iii. 8, 9.

stronger;" they are tending to perfection, and make the soul strive and thrive in holiness;* "going from step to step, from strength to strength, pressing towards the mark," rising as the sun unto noon-day, or as the water to the spring; yea, "this water shall still be springing up to eternal life."—John iv. 14. Grace makes the soul long after means of growth, and so to "increase with the increase of God, till it be a perfect man in Christ;" the soul is insatiable and never saith it hath enough, "till it have arrived at the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," Eph. iv. 13; yea, "till it have attained to the resurrection of the dead," Phil. iii. 11. O sirs, examine your hearts herein—how do you come on and increase in religion? do you grow in grace, in knowledge, faith, love, humility, repentance, self-denial, and heavenly-mindedness? where is your proficiency? have you found grace like a grain of mustard-seed? have these mercies ripened into the blade and full ear of deliberate and proportionable fruit-bearing? A right Christian will never say he is good enough while he sojourns in this lower region, nor yet happy enough till he be with God in heaven.

CHAP. IX.

THE SURE MERCIES OF DAVID TEND TO PRODUCE CONVICTION.

IV. THIS subject may be considered as an occasion of conviction or reprehension, which may seriously affect sinners and saints.

* Prov. iv. 18.

1. If the mercies of the covenant be sure mercies, (as we have proved fully,) O what folly are those souls guilty of that are Christless, graceless, and careless, that have no interest in these mercies, and never trouble themselves about ensuring these covenant mercies to themselves. How many in the world are destitute of these mercies! There is a generation of men and women that live within the pale of the visible church, that may be called *lo-ruhamah*, for they have not yet obtained mercy; nay, in the state they are in, there is no mercy for them, because they are not yet in Christ, through whom these covenant mercies flow: unconverted souls are unconcerned persons in these mercies; those dogs have nothing to do with this children's bread; and yet who so apt to catch and snatch these precious dainties? they love to hear the glorious privileges laid open—such as, justification, reconciliation, adoption, and eternal life; and yet we must say with sorrow, they have nothing to do with them: if they hear discourses of God's mercy, how are they pleased, tickled, and even enraptured! they make no question but they shall be saved, as well as others; and they think, surely God that made them will not damn them. But ask these poor souls whether they be savingly converted, renewed, or engrafted into Christ by faith? alas, they know not what this means; they never asked their own souls the question; nay, they are ready to think that it is a very needless inquiry, or impossible to know; however this never lay upon their hearts and consciences, as necessary in order to clear up this important case—whether they have obtained mercy? But let all who are thus ignorant know, that “he that made them will not have mercy on them,” Isa. xxvii. 11; let all profane rebels against the King of heaven know, that “God will not be merciful to any

wicked transgressor," Psalm lix. 5. God's attributes are all analogical and correspondent; he will not cease to be just and holy that he may be merciful, he will be merciful in his own way; mercy and justice shall go hand in hand. It is a ridiculous folly for men to conceit, they shall have the mercies of the covenant that are not within the covenant; this is that fallacy that logicians call *fallacia dividendi conjungenda*, the fallacy of dividing things to be conjoined; it is most dangerous and damnable in divinity, when souls dream of having peace without grace, or happiness without holiness; but let men know there is no mercy but in the covenant—where no ark of the covenant, no seat of mercy; where there is no work of grace, there is no covenant of grace; where Christ is a Saviour he will be a Sovereign, where he gives remission of sins he will give repentance; his way of blessing is by turning persons from their iniquities;* God will not shew mercy to any but in his own way; such as obtain mercy in the enjoyment of pardoning grace, must obtain mercy in converting grace; sanctification goeth along with justification; Paul obtained mercy by forsaking his old courses;† God saveth us according to his mercy—how? why, "by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost," Titus iii. 5; they are saved from sin, that are saved from wrath and hell. It is a self-deceiving, soul-destructive contradiction to dream of pardoning, without sanctifying grace. Thousands in the world fancy a God to themselves made up all of mercy, and let them do what they please, they can bolster up themselves with this conceit, "God is merciful;" and so, as God himself saith, Psalm l. 21. "These things hast thou done and I kept silence: thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as

* Acts v. 31. iii. 26.

† 1 Tim. i. 13.

thyself, but I will reprove thee, and set thy sins in order before thee;" as if he had said, think not to make me a patron of thy wickedness; it is true, I spare thee and suffer thee to live quietly, but forbearance is no acquittance; think not I love thee because I afford thee outward mercies, which thou abusest to licentiousness, but I am resolved to take vengeance on thee; there is justice with me, as well as mercy, and there is a season wherein I shall pour out the vials of my wrath upon vessels of wrath that are fitted to destruction; a time is coming when I shall tear you in pieces, and there shall be none to deliver. O sirs, the condition of graceless, unconverted souls is sad; for,

(1.) They are under a sure and dreadful sentence of condemnation; for as the mercies of the new covenant are sure to believers, so the curses of the old covenant are as sure to all unbelievers; as the second Adam conveys certain life, so the first Adam conveys certain death to his seed; as "he that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life," so "he that believeth not shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him," John iii. 36; as "he that believeth is acquitted," so "he that believeth not is condemned already," ver. 18; all his other sins are bound upon him by this of unbelief—this is the condemnation. It is as impossible that the devils in hell shall be saved, as that unconverted sinners, while such, shall be saved; for Christ saith again and again, "except a man be converted, except he be born again, he cannot see, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God,"* and binds it with strong asseverations, and dare any one that pretends to believe God's promise question the verity of his positions or comminations? yea, God hath bound himself by oath in this case as well as in the other,

* Matt. xviii. 3. John iii. 5.

Heb. iii. 11. it is spoken there concerning the rebellious murmuring Israelites; "I swear in my wrath," saith God, "they shall not enter into my rest;" or if they shall enter, then, as if he had said, never trust me more; nay, let me not be God—but what is this to us? Yes, the apostle applies it to unbelievers in gospel times, Heb. iv. 1—5, &c. hence he repeats the oath again referring to unbelieving gospellers, that they shall never enter into the heavenly Canaan. And surely unconverted sinners are in a woful plight, of whom it may be truly said, that God himself cannot save them while they continue in that state; for there is no way but one of entering heaven, that is Jesus Christ—and how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?* there is no other way revealed, and do we think God will forsake his ordinary road, and quit his glorious design, to gratify a generation of wilful neglecters and rejecters of this blessed contrivance of saving sinners by interest in Jesus Christ? It cannot be, you must either go to heaven this way, or down to hell by your own way.

(2.) Their souls are not sure to be another moment out of hell-torments; poor graceless sinners cannot secure themselves upon any real Scripture grounds, that they shall another hour enjoy that bastard peace of conscience, in which they flatter themselves; for ought they know, their case may be like Belshazzar's, Dan v. 5, while they are drinking, carousing, ranting, revelling, some dreadful hand-writing or testimony of God's indignation may break forth against them which may mar all their mirth, appal their spirits, trouble their thoughts, loose the joints of their loins, and make their knees smite one against another. Oh what terror and horror will the dreadful summons of death

* Acts iv. 12. Heb. ii. 3.

strike into them ! How will these fool-hardy warriors against an infinite God, call to the rocks and mountains to cover them ! Oh what a sudden change, what a sad catastrophe will the cold hand of death make with them ! What a fall will these secure and senseless sinners have from the height of worldly preferment to the depth of eternal torments ! Stand a little and look at that rich and wretched miser in the gospel, that had no room for his fruits and goods, that sung a requiem to his soul for many years ; yet alas, had not one night to take his ease in. “ Thou fool,” saith God, “ this night shall thy soul be required of thee,”* or they shall require thy soul ; that is, the devils who are waiting for a commission from God to catch hold of graceless souls, to hale them to torments as soon as they have forsaken their wretched bodies—so some interpret it. However, the rich man’s soul was suddenly snatched from a full table and dainty fare into eternal misery, without a drop of water or hopes of mercy ; for let him tear his heart with bitter outcries—“ Father Abraham, have mercy on me,” neither his father Abraham, nor the God of Abraham will have any mercy for him : † former offers of mercy are now turned into flames of fury ; they have wilfully forsaken their own mercy, and now are wofully forsaken by the God of mercy. O consider this you that are yet in your sins, dancing about the pit, and are ready every instant to drop into eternal woe.

(3.) Their present mistake will aggravate their woful state. Oh what a dreadful disappointment will this be, for persons that lived demurely in the world, and passed for very civil neighbours, even for choice saints, yet now to be set on the left hand amongst the goats at the great day ; yea, persons that thought

* See Luke xii. 17—20.

† See Luke xvi. 24—26.

themselves to be in the ready road to heaven, and to be, as they imagined, about to step into glory to miss their footing, and fall into eternal torments ! It is a dreadful sight to see soul and hopes giving up the ghost together, and swept away as the spider's web into the fire of hell.* Alas, for a man that hath all his days been building castles in the air, and erecting the house of his fair profession upon the sliding sand of fancy and inagination ! to have all come tottering down with one puff of death, will be a dreadful sight ! Ministers told them of this, but they would not believe, nor suspect their state, nor spend one hour in searching whether they were right or not ; many a time were they warned of the danger, but they pleased themselves in wilful self-delusion, and now they are past recovery ; they would not be brought to a holy despair of themselves, that they might have sure footing in these sure mercies, and now they shall and must despair of ever having part or portion in these desirable and permanent mercies ; they would not be beaten from their carnal shifts and senseless pleas, and now they must and shall be for ever banished from them, and feel the bitterness of them. Ministers could not deal with them, but God can ; and it will be a heart-confounding day, when the varnish shall be washed off, and all rotten props that kept the soul from awful apprehensions shall be torn up, and they shall see themselves deceived by Satan, the world, and their own self-flattering hearts into eternal misery.

(4.) But once more ; many things in and about these sure mercies will augment their eternal misery. Alas, sirs, here there is no speaking to wicked men, they will not abide a sober conference about their souls, they have not leisure nor patience to yield an attentive ear

* Job xi. 20. and viii. 14.

to discourses about these sure mercies ; but a time is coming wherein they shall be forced to think of them as lost mercies to their cost : now they have other things to mind, the world doth so fill their ears and hearts, that they thrust these things from them, and judge themselves unworthy of them. They are just like Jeremiah's wild ass used to the wilderness, " that snuffeth up the wind at her pleasure, in her occasion who can turn her away ?——but in her month they shall find her."* So there is no dealing with wicked men in their jollity and frolic fits, but their month of sorrow is approaching either here or hereafter ; and oh the bitter pangs and travail that shall then possess them ! in this world they would not consider, but hereafter they shall have an eternity to consider of these covenant mercies, though in a hopeless way : as

[i.] They will think of the nature of these mercies they have lost. O how free, how sweet, how suitable, how satisfying were they ! how sure would God have made them to them ! and the better these mercies, the bitterer their sorrow on the loss of them.

[ii.] They will think that once they might have enjoyed them, and been happy in that enjoyment ; once they had a day of grace, means of grace, ministers persuaded, the Spirit moved, mercies, afflictions, word, and rod—every thing spoke this language : O embrace these mercies ; but I refused, and now they are out of my reach.

[iii.] They will think, and think again, how near they were to the embracing of these mercies ; O what convictions, individually they will say, did God fasten on my heart by such and such a sermon ! I was once half-persuaded to embrace religion, how near was I to

* Jer. ii. 24.

a full closure ! I went home with strong resolutions to be another man ; but this deceitful heart beguiled me, and so I put off repentance till now it is too late.

[iv.] They will think what these mercies would have done for them ; these mercies would have folded their souls within the arms of God's love ; these would have filled their souls with grace, fitted them for God's service, and furnished them for glory ; these mercies would have rendered them profitable in life, comfortable in death, and happy for ever : the possessors of these mercies are gracious saints. Yet again,

[v.] They will think with sadness what they have exchanged these mercies for ; they have passed off these precious and sure mercies for trash and trifles, for dung and dirt, for a little paltry pleasure or conscience-wounding profit, which now they have left behind them in the world, and only carry the guilt and shame along with them, which must abide by them, when sensual delights are vanished away. Oh what gnashing of teeth and indignation at themselves will this beget for their former madness !

[vi.] They must think how many thousands of souls were made happy by a gracious reception and full enjoyment of these mercies ; persons whom they despised in the world, and thought not worthy to come into their company, shall sit down with the patriarchs, prophets, and apostles in heaven ; but these wretched souls are thrust out. Oh, says the wretched subject of damnation, I might have been happy, as well as yonder shining saint ; he was a suffering creature, I was a rejoicing miscreant ; now he is comforted, and I am tormented. Yet, once more,

[vii.] The damned in hell will bethink themselves who was in the fault, and whence it comes to pass that these mercies were not made sure to their souls ; and

they can charge none herewith but themselves : they will then see that none was to be blamed but their own wilful hearts, whatever they may object here, or boast of their willingness, yet God lays the blame there, and so shall they, will they, nill they, they must be speechless, and charge themselves only as making faggots to burn themselves with for ever. Oh, will the soul think, I may thank myself for this ; I wilfully forsook my own mercies to observe lying vanities ; this is the fruit of my own doings, I would needs be damned ; ministers and godly friends persuaded, God stopt my way by his providences and ordinances, but I would run into the pit, and here I am shut up in eternal darkness ; woe is me that ever I was born ! O that I had either never heard of or else embraced those mercies, that I have rejected, and that will follow my soul with horror for ever !

Ah sirs, I beseech you consider, such a day will come, and then you will remember these things, and they will lie heavy upon you, then you will feel what an evil and bitter thing it is that you have forsaken God : then you will vomit up your sweet morsels, and remember those sweet words that here you despised ;* then you will remember the possibility and probability you once had, of obtaining these sweet mercies ; now they are attainable, but if once you have taken a step upon the shore of eternity, you are past hopes and remedy, for the dead and damned do only hear the sound of wisdom with their ears, but are never likely to enjoy the benefit thereof.† O put not off these things with some slight and transient thoughts, but shame yourselves to a holy diligence.

2. Another sort to be reprov'd, are God's own children that are guilty of four lamentable faults :—

* Psalm cxli. 6.

† Job xxviii. 22.

- (1.) They are apt to bargain.
- (2.) To compound about these mercies.
- (3.) They do not live upon these mercies ; nor,
- (4.) Up to them.

(1.) God's children would have the mercies of the covenant ; but then they have a mind to indent* with God, to be secured from the crosses attending these mercies ; the flesh shrinks and is loth to suffer ; we are like Orpah, we would follow Christ a little way, but fain would we make our bargain so, as not to follow him in a rough way. But, sirs, consider would you have the sweets and not the bitters of godliness ? Did you not take Christ (in a marriage covenant) for better and worse ? will you pick and choose with him ? do not right virgin-souls follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth ? Ah sirs, this covenant relation is an express, voluntary, universal, unreserved self-resignation. The bearing of the cross was always supposed and implied ; † and if you will not have him with it, you are to be without, for the cross is *evangelii genius*, the very inseparable property, complexion, and companion of the gospel : and Christ would not have any cheated with imaginary hopes of immunity from sufferings, but tells them the worst, and bids them sit down and count the cost ; ‡ and if you did not so at first, you have not been sincere, and if you did, and still would have Christ—why do you now grumble at bearing that which you freely chose ? Besides, know this, crosses for Christ are special gospel mercies, for afflictions are adapted to become real mercies of the covenant, and therefore they are promised as well as any other mercies, Psalm lxxxix. 31, 32, and David acknowledges affliction to be an act and fruit of covenant faithfulness, because it fetched him from his wander-

* To bargain. † Matt. x. 37, 38. Mark x. 30. ‡ Luke xiv. 28.

ings, instructed him in God's statutes, and therefore was good for him.* Crosses for Christ never did any hurt, but have been usually means of good; many Christians have blessed God for them; God sees we cannot live or do well without them; Paul gloried in the cross of Christ, took pleasure in distresses for Christ—and why then are we afraid of them, or would bargain to be secured from them? be ashamed of your nice and delicate spirits.

(2.) Some Christians are too apt to compound with God about these covenant mercies; † my meaning is, they can satisfy themselves without the whole series of covenant mercies, they are willing and content to be put off with some, and do not solicit all; they can apply some promises, not others—see a necessity of pardoning mercy, but do not plead and act faith for purifying, softening, quickening, enlightening mercies of the covenant. Consider, Christians, by thus doing,

[i.] You injure yourselves, you need all these covenant mercies; there is not one of the fore-mentioned blessings, that a Christian can live and thrive without; all are of great use, every one hath its peculiar excellency, a gracious soul cannot spare any of them; nay, it is a sin for it to be content with less than God hath promised; he that is not for all, is truly for none at all. The true owner will not divide; in one part of your life or other, you will want all covenant mercies; it is base unworthiness and ingratitude to slight any of them.

* Psalm cxix. 75, 67, 71.

† In closing with offers of grace, we must be uniform. Earthly things God is pleased to retail. All have some, none have all. But the heavenly treasure, he will not break the whole piece, and cut it into remnants; if God would cut off as much as would serve men's turn, he might have customers enough.—*Mr. Gurnal's Christ. Armour*, page 310.

[ii.] You dishonour God, and disparage these mercies, as if God were not able to give you all, and pay the whole debt of his free and full promise ; as for example, suppose a rich tradesman owe you a sum of money, and you come to him and tell him you are willing to abate him so much, and compound with him, and take of him a shilling in the pound, or a pound in the hundred for the whole debt, he looks upon himself as disparaged, being a sufficient chapman, he will not have his ability or honesty questioned ; but quickly answers, what do you think I am breaking ? I will not be abated any thing, here is your money, I will pay you all. So God would not be compounded with ; he looks upon it as a dishonour to his free grace and faithfulness, and bids the soul open its mouth wide, and promiseth to fill it, Psalm lxxxi. 10 ; that is, ask great things, many things, spare not, ask what thou needest, ask what I have promised, I am neither sparing nor backward in giving, stint not thyself in asking, I shall not send thee away empty ; they that come for most, speed best ; and when thou hast gone to the utmost extent of thy reach in asking, “ I can, and will give thee abundantly more than thou art able to ask or think.”—Ephes. iii. 20. O Christians, chide yourselves for your sinful mannerliness and modesty ; and widen your contracted spirits for larger incomes of grace and mercy. Remember, these covenant supplies are all of mercy, not deserved ; and they are mercies in the plural, containing large and liberal revenues to be communicated to indigent wanting souls.

(3.) God’s children often do not live upon the mercies of the covenant ; we blame them that have good estates, and live beneath them ; and well we may, for it is a base and a beggarly practice, when persons have enough, but want power to eat, take their portion, and

enjoy the good of all they have ; this is a sore evil, and a sad curse, and the contrary is good, and decent, a great blessing, and the very gift of God :* and O what a sad evil for the saints of God, the heirs of promise to live below their estates, none so rich as real saints, they are heirs to a vast inheritance ; “ God himself is their portion ; yea, the portion of their inheritance, and of their cup, he maintains their lot ;”† they have enough, and they cannot lose what they have. O at what a high rate should such rich heirs live ! and what an unworthy degenerate spirit doth it discover to live in so beggarly a manner as most of us do ! As,

[i.] To live so much by sense, and so little by faith ; it is the gospel character of believers, to live by their faith ; to walk by faith and not by sense, or sight, to see him that is invisible, to venture their all upon unseen grounds :‡ and O what a noble and generous, what a brave and a blessed life is the life of faith ! and on the contrary, what a sorry and a sordid, what a beggarly and niggardly life is a life of sense ! such a soul goes a begging, and craves a crumb of one, a morsel of another to make a meal of, and after all the soul’s appetite is hungry and craving, and at the best, how quickly are such things gone ! Alas, sirs, objects of sense will not carry you through the world ; sense will sink with Peter where it cannot feel a bottom ; it is faith only that will lift the head above water, and the heart above terror, when you must pass through a sea of sorrows in this tumultuous world. Christians, where is your faith ? you are distinguished from others by this precious grace : the want of this undoeth us : hence it is,

[ii.] That God’s children are so often at a loss, and

* Eccles. v. 13, 19.

† Ps. xvi. 5.

‡ Hab. ii. 4. Rom. i. 17. 2 Cor. v. 7. Heb. xi.

know not what to do ; no wonder if they be at their wits' end, when they are at their faith's end. Many circumstances, yea, any affliction will throw a saint upon his back when he stands not upon the feet of faith, or leans not upon Christ by faith. This is the reason why in temptation we cry out, God hath cast me off for ever, and he will be favourable no more ; and we give up the buckler, and yield to Satan's assaults and demands, which make us become our enemies' sport ; yea, any little loss or cross dismays us, as though we were undone, or as though, with poor Jacob once, our life were bound up in a lad, or bag, or such like things. Ah, dear sirs, where is your delight in God ? * where is your encouraging yourselves in God ? † where is your rejoicing in the Lord with Habakkuk, when a cloud or curtain hath covered all your worldly enjoyments ? ‡ why do you not oppose one God to all the armies of evils that beset you round ? why do you not take the more content in God, when you have the less of the creature to take content in ? why do you not boast in your God ? and bear up yourselves big with your hopes in God and expectations from him ? do you not see young heirs to great estates, act and spend accordingly ? and why shall you, being the King of heaven's sons, be lean and ragged from day to day, as though you were not worth a groat ? O sirs, live upon your portion, chide yourselves for living below what you have ; there are great and precious promises, rich enriching mercies ; you may make use of God's all-sufficiency, you can blame none but yourselves if you be defective or discouraged. A woman truly godly for the main, having buried a child, and sitting alone in sadness, did yet cheer up her heart with this expression—God lives ; and having parted

* Psalm xxxvii. 4. † 1 Sam. xxx. 6. ‡ Hab. iii. 17, 18.

with another, still she repeated—Comforts die, but God lives; at last her dear husband dies, and she sat oppressed and almost overwhelmed with sorrow, a little child she had yet surviving, having observed what before she spoke to comfort herself, comes to her and saith, “Is God dead? Mother, is God dead?” this reached her heart, and by God’s blessing she recovered her former confidence in her God, who is a living God. Thus do you chide yourselves—ask your fainting spirits under pressing, outward sorrows, does not God live? and why then doth not thy soul revive? why doth thy heart die within thee when comforts die? cannot a living God support thy dying hopes? thus, Christians, argue down your discouraged and disquieted spirits, as David did.—Psalm xlii. 5. But so much for that.

(4.) As Christians do not live upon, so they do not live conformably to these sure mercies of David, and that, in their frequently walking so

Unholily, unsteadily, uncomfortably and unfruitfully.

[i.] Many of God’s children walk unholily, unspiritually, untenderly, not with that conscientiousness, exactness, and closeness they ought to do. If God’s children lived up to their mercies and privileges, O how holy would they be, seeing that these things shall be dissolved, and seeing we look for such things as we do; nay, since we see and feel such things mystically already, even a new heaven, and new earth, after a sort, in this new covenant dispensation, “what manner of persons ought we to be? and O how diligent should we be that we may be found of Christ in peace, without spot and blameless!” 2 Pet. iii. 11—14. But O Christians, how far we come short, yea, how inconsistent are our lives with our privileges! how incongruous are our duties to our mercies! yea, how different are

our spirits from our comforts ! What sirs, heavenly mercies and carnal hearts, flat duties, earthly conversations ! O shame yourselves before the Lord, blush, tremble to think of your unconformableness to covenant mercies ! How far are you below these enjoyments ! Doth not your unanswerable walking give just ground of suspicion, whether you have interest in these things or not ? What sirs, are you saints and yet earth-worms ? are you partakers of a heavenly calling, and yet walk so like the men of the world ? Is it fit to see eagles on a dirty dunghill, or heaven-born souls in scenes of pollution ? Either be better or quit your claim ; you dishonour God, and discredit religion more than others. Alas friends, God will not be beholden to you for the mere title of being religious, he will not regard you unless you be really such. Mercies infer duty, and licentiousness is inconsistent with the nature and end of covenant mercies. You grieve God's spirit, cross his designs, wrong your own souls, sadden the hearts of the righteous, and open the mouths of wicked men. You little know what hurt you do by one visible act of sinning. Consider, that as the privileges of the covenant bespeak holiness, so the conditions of the covenant include holiness,* and how then come heirs of promise to be so unlike their heavenly Father ? what are the children of light doing when tampering with works of darkness ?

[ii.] God's children sometimes walk very unsteadily, that is, they are off and on, inconstant, have good moods and emotions, but they wear off, and decay, they quickly lose their lively impressions, and are constant in inconstancy ; they are zealous and forward for God

* Qui bonus est et justus, et mundus et immaculatus, neque malum aliquid neque injustum neque abominandum in suo sponsali thalamo sustinebit.—*Iræn. adv. Hær. lib. 4.*

one while, at other times they are backward and indifferent. Ah sirs, is this a living up to these sure mercies of David, these constant, unchangeable, invariable mercies? This covenant is ordered in all things and sure, and so are the mercies of it. How comes it to pass then that covenanters are so often discomposed, disordered and unsettled? Sometimes they are for God, and sometimes not; they are halting betwixt two opinions; like drunken men, they are leaning sometimes to the right hand, at other times to the left; like Reuben, “they are unstable as water,”* and so shall not excel; like Ephraim,† a cake half-baked, hot and hard on one side, cold and doughy on the other; or resembling the same Ephraim’s goodness, like a morning cloud, or early dew that tarries not long, but is quickly scattered by the violent storms of persecutions, or dried up by the warm beams of prosperity. These unstable Christians are like James’s‡ waves of the sea—like Jude’s || wandering stars or flying clouds carried about of winds—or like Paul’s § children, tossed to and fro; they are like locusts that move to and again—like grasshoppers that are still up and down in variable motions; the hearts of such are as a cart wheel, saith one, and their thoughts as a rolling axle-tree. I know, the best of God’s children are incident to liftings up and castings down in point of feelings and enlargements, and this may be the effect of God’s affording or suspending the influences of his grace; but I speak this of a Christian’s remissness, and his inconstancy through neglect and carelessness, and want of stirring up in his soul the graces of God’s Spirit, and so losing the liveliness which he feels sometimes; and again he may be warmed and melted, but afterwards returns

* Gen. xlix. 4.

† Hos. vii. 8, and vi. 4.

‡ James i. 6.

|| Jude 12, 13.

§ Eph. iv. 14.

unto folly. This is often such a Christian's round, and how unsuitable is this for sincere believers? These stars are to be fixed in the firmament of the church, and are not to be wandering stars or meteors; these trees of the Lord's planting should be strongly rooted, and not like reeds tossed with every wind; they should be pillars in the house of God, and not feathers or weathercocks upon house tops; these living stones should not be round and rolling, but square and fixed, still settled upon the foundation.* If the testimony of Christ be confirmed in us, † we should hold fast our confidence firm unto the end, and pray hard for a more constant spirit, as David did, Psalm li. 10, that we may be like Jachin and Boaz, stability and strength; for if we be stable, we shall be strong, and so answerable to these sure mercies of David.

[iii.] It is a sad thing to see the heirs of this covenant walk uncomfortably. What, are you partakers and possessors of mercies, and yet sad? have you interest in sweet and sure mercies, and yet are you dejected? what will lift you up, if mercy will not? and what can interrupt your peace, when mercy waits on you to cheer your hearts? thou mayest lose estate, health, good name, relations, liberty; yea, thy life is in continual hazard, but as long as these mercies of the covenant are sure, thou hast no reason to complain. An ancient writer compares a Christian that is disconsolate for outward losses or crosses, to a man that hath a fine orchard, the trees whereof are richly laden with store of precious fruit, and because the wind blows off some leaves, the man sits down and takes on heavily; he weeps and mourns and cries out he is undone; why, what is the matter? why, the wind hath taken off some leaves, but the roots, and trees, and fruits are safe:

* Non vacillantes, sed tetragonoi.

† 1 Cor. i. 6.

should we not judge that a fond and foolish man? Just thus it is with the Christian; God and Christ, promises and gospel mercies are sure and steadfast by an inviolable gospel covenant. Yet the sinful, silly creature lies whining and complaining for the loss of some leaves of worldly comforts, which he may live well without. Ah, saith the poor soul, but these outward things are not the chief cause of my trouble and discouragement; did I know that those mercies were made sure to me, I should be comfortable—but, alas, I fear I have no share therein. I shall answer this doubt afterwards, at present I only say, lay thy hand upon thy heart, and deal ingenuously. Is this the ground of thy trouble? is not this only pretended? is not something else the real cause? the heart is deceitful; look again, see what comforted thee before this outward trouble came, and what cheers thee when thy present pressure is removed? But suppose it be jealousies about thy interest; yet, why shouldest thou be uncomfortable? hast not thou ventured thy soul on a sure foundation? what reason hast thou for discouragement? a faith of adherence brings some settlement as well as a faith of evidence. Every act of faith brings some comfort; “whom having not seen,” (saith the apostle, with reference to a corporeal sight, so may I say of a kind of spiritual sense and assurance) “ye love; in whom though now you see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory,” 1 Pet. i. 8. Recumbency hath a kind of complacency; it argues want of faith to want joy, and unbelief is an aggravated sin, considering the assurances given us in the gospel; but more of this hereafter. But O consider, sirs, what wrong you do to yourselves by uncomfortable walking? you weaken and exhaust your strength and spirits. What discredit you bring upon

the ways of God, rendering them gloomy and forbidding in the account of others ! What opposition it expresseth both to many positive precepts, and to these sure mercies of David ! Methinks I hear the God of heaven thus bespeaking the gracious, troubled heart : soul, what ails thee ? what is it thou wouldest have ? I have given thee many glorious gifts ; pardon, reconciliation, adoption, ordinances, the benefit of all my works of providence, a title to the good things of earth whilst thou livest, and a free admission into heaven when thou diest ; nay, I have given thee myself, my Son, my Spirit, and that by the surest marriage covenant—and will not all this revive thy fainting spirit ? what wouldest thou have more ? and what canst thou desire in order to make it surer to thee ? speak but the word and it shall be done. Have I not gone beyond thy expectation ? and why then art thou thus drooping and disconsolate ? is thy heart revived when mortal, deceitful man makes thee a promise of some outward good ? and canst thou now faint, when the eternal God hath taken all this pains to assure thy troubled heart of thy interest in these sure mercies of David ? O Christians, shame yourselves for your uncomfortableness ! Are the consolations of God small unto you ? Thank yourselves for your discouragements, and let it be matter of trouble that you have so many needless, useless troubles in your souls.

[iv.] Another fault in the heirs of the promises, whereby they are not conformable to these mercies, is unfruitfulness ; herein, they do not live up to these mercies, and are exceeding defective and imperfect, especially in two respects—the fruit they bring forth is both small and sour.

1. It is usually, but small in quantity, short of that abundance and ripeness that should come off so good a

soil as mercy is, especially when mercy is the tillage. God's vineyard is on a very fruitful hill,* so we read it; but in Hebrew, † it is the horn of the son of oil. I know the son of oil may import a very rich soil, as son of the morning means what is exceedingly bright and luminous; and so God's people were planted in Canaan, which was an exceedingly fruitful country, but the passage may, at least, allusively affirm of real saints, that they are planted in the horn of the son of oil, even in the Son of God, who was anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows, and in whom true believers are planted, and from whom they may draw abundant juice and fatness, as branches do from the root of the olive-tree, Rom. xi. 17; moreover, what abundant pains doth God the Father, the husbandman, take, to make souls very fruitful; he "takes away such as bear no fruit at all," and "every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit."—John xv. 2. O what mercies do the saints partake of! gospel privileges, promises, providences, ordinances, experiences, comforts, corrections, every thing that might make them fruitful in good works, in praying, reading, meditating, conferring, exact walking, doth God distribute; and where is their answerable fruitfulness? God expects more and riper fruit. Alas, how short and defective are we! how little glory do we bring to God! how little profit unto others, or comfort to our own souls! We should be filled with the fruits of righteousness; we should abound more and more, and bring forth fruits meet for sincere repentance, and be truly fruitful in every good work. ‡ But are we so or not? I much suspect it; and what

* Isaiah vi. 1.

בקרן בן שמן †

‡ Phil. i. 11.

1 Thes. iii. 12.

Matt. iii. 8.

Col. i. 10.

a shame is it that we should lie under the warm influences of the sun of righteousness so long, and be so unfruitful ! The God of heaven humble us for this !

2. I am afraid that the fruits we do bring forth are but sour and bitter, not so sweet and kindly as might be expected of the genuine fruits and products of these sure mercies. My meaning is, that the obedience and performances of believers too often flow from a spirit of bondage, fear and terror, and not from that filial child-like disposition, and the evangelical spirit of adoption that should be the principle and actuating cause of their spiritual obedience. I know legal fears and terrors are good in their tendency, to drive the soul out of itself, and unto Christ ; but afterwards, a spirit of love best becomes a child of God ; * hence, saith the apostle, Rom. viii. 15, “ ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father.” A child-like boldness best befits a son. It is more acceptable to God to see souls attracted to him by silken cords of love, than scourged to him by severe lashes of wrath. Christ’s soldiers are not so much pressed for his service by compulsion, as they are volunteers by a spontaneous movement. All our duties should be free-will offerings ; but alas, sirs, how unwilling and forced are many of our performances ! how grumbling are we in our actings for God ! We go to God as though it were our burden, not with that delight and cheerfulness we ought. Consider sirs, how readily God offers us mercy ! how freely Christ laid down his life for us ! how acceptable a work it is to the blessed Spirit to apply these mercies to us ! and be ashamed to be so reluctant and dull in your performances ; yea, consider the dispensation you are under—a gospel covenant, made up of

* 2 Tim. i. 7.

mercy, and this should ripen our fruits to more sweetness and maturity than the Old Testament dispensation. As you know apricots and other fruit that are upon a wall, under the direct influence or powerful reflection of the sun beams, are sooner ripe, and sweeter when ripe, than such as are in the shade ; so our fruits in gospel times should be better than theirs under the law ; but, alas, how far do we fall short of David's warm spirit for God ? or the holy acts put forth by him and other saints of God under types and shadows, when these sweet mercies were not so clearly revealed to them, and when the sun of righteousness did not shed his beams with so much warmth upon them ! Ah Christians, if you would study mercies more, your spirits would be in a better frame for duty. David saith, " I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercies, and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple."—Psalm v. 7. Observe it ; the sense of God's mercy is an excellent ingredient in the worship of God ; yea, it begets a holy awe of God, for these two are very consistent ; and, indeed, nothing is so prevalent a motive to duty, and dissuasive from iniquity, and persuasive to the exercise of repentance, as a sense of mercy is. This truth, Scripture and experience will abundantly confirm. But I have been too long on this subject ; only let God's children be humbled for their too, too legal disposition, and breathe after a more evangelical spirit by the studying of these mercies, rather than poring upon guilt and wrath.

CHAP. X.

THE SURE MERCIES OF DAVID DESERVE CONSIDERATION, AND SHOULD EXCITE IN ALL A SOLICITUDE TO OBTAIN THEM.

V. ARGUMENTS may be used to induce all classes of persons to look after their share in these sure mercies of David ; and O that I had it in my power by any means to evince their importance ! O what a mercy would it be, if by these sure mercies of David, and these discourses about them, some soul were enamoured therewith, and set, in good earnest, to make them its own. But shall I need to use many arguments to persuade any person to accept of mercy ? Yes, certainly ; the most part of the world forsake their own mercies by observing lying vanities ; and they that can experimentally distinguish betwixt a gracious and graceless heart, find that it is the hardest thing in the world to close in with mercies in God's way. It is an easy thing for a secure sinner to presume upon mercy, to make mercy a pillow to sleep upon with ease, to build castles in the air, and feed himself with vain conceits of the mercy of God—this any one can do ; but to be got off our own grounds of dependence, to despair of ourselves, to accept of Jesus Christ, to give up ourselves to God in covenant, to venture a troubled heart upon the promises of free grace. This is a high and hard work, an arduous and difficult undertaking ; but this is done by every converted sinner, and a soul never obtains mercy till it be, indeed, savingly converted, 1 Tim. i. 13. If you be *lo-ammi*, not God's people by way of covenant, you are *lo-ruhamah*,* that is, persons that have not

* Hos. i. 6—9.

obtained mercy. O look after an interest in these sure mercies of David. Consider,

1. Nothing else in the world can be made sure ; we live in an inconstant world ; every thing is upon the wheel of change ; sublunary comforts are like the moon, sometimes at the full, and sometimes in the wane—nothing continues in a fixed state ; a man may be rich to-day and poor to-morrow, therefore the apostle calls them uncertain riches, or uncertainty of riches in the abstract. Now then, saith the apostle, Christians must lay up in store for themselves “ a good foundation against the time to come.”—1 Tim. vi. 17—19. Alas, riches were never true to any that trusted to them ; the things of the world are like sand or smoke, with which you cannot fill your hand.* Who would be so fond of that which he knows he cannot keep ? It is the part of a wise man to purchase such an estate as he may enjoy ; friends, goods, honours, health, pleasures have their periods, but these mercies are sure and everlasting. O the vast difference ! It is very deserving of consideration, that the things only that make us happy, can be made sure ; but the things of this world, which cannot make us happy, cannot be made sure—and, indeed, whatever may be lost is not capable of making any truly happy. Now heavenly things are durable as well as suitable to the soul, therefore, let us all take the counsel of our Lord Jesus, Matt. vi. 19, 20, “ Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal—but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth

* Plato said, Οὐ πένία ποτε ἡ ὀλιγοχρηματία, ἀλλ' ἡ ἀπληστία· ἥς φροῦδις ὁ ἀγαθὸς ὦν καὶ πλούσιος γ' ἂν εἴη.—Non est paupertas pecuniæ paucitas, sed insatiabilitas ; quæ si recesserit, qui bonus est dives quoque fuerit.—*Clem. Alexand. Strom. lib. 2.*

corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal."

2. Except you have an interest in these sure mercies, common mercies are accursed to you, nor indeed have you any real covenant title to any thing you enjoy, whatever right you may have before men,* yet, you are, in the court of heaven,† in a sense, usurpers or encroachers; you have forfeited all by actual rebellion, and have what you enjoy but as condemned prisoners or malefactors, to keep you alive till the execution of the righteous sentence of condemnation. O the woful condition of unconverted sinners! they are accursed with a gospel curse, and under a dreadful sentence of excommunication.‡ There is a curse in their houses, on their actions, on their relations, as it respects them; there is a curse upon their very blessings, Mal. ii. 2; there is a plague in their apparel, poison in their meat, and, we may say, death is in the pot as to all their enjoyments—my meaning is, nothing is truly sanctified or perfumed with covenant mercy, and if God give a commission, whatever they enjoy may be their bane; whithersoever they go, a curse goes with them; whatever they partake of, a curse meets them in it; whoever they are with, a curse attends them. O fearful state! it was sad to be under the curse of a mortal man—Ham found his father Noah's curse heavy; but oh how heavy is the curse of Almighty God, who, with a word, can send the soul into hell, and follow his stroke into another world! Dear friends, who would live in this dreadful state another hour? On the contrary, whosoever hath these mercies of the covenant hath all blessings blessed; yea, and also crosses, and even curses are turned into blessings. Who would not be covetous of such a state? But to hasten,

* In foro humano. † In foro Dei. ‡ 1 Cor. xvi. 22. Prov. iii. 33.

3. Without these covenant mercies the soul is not accepted in its best duties : neither person nor performance is owned by God ; it is only upon a covenant account that any are accepted ; indeed in the covenant of works the person was accepted for the work's sake, but in the covenant of grace, God accepts the person first, and then the work ; if the man be in Christ, then the offering is taken in good part, though it be but a turtle-dove or young pigeon, though but a sigh or groan ; God takes a posy of flowers (of sweet-smelling graces) though mixed with offensive weeds and pricking briars of vanity and corruption, gathered by a child, and perfumed by Christ's mediation, and is better pleased therewith, than with the most odoriferous gifts of unconverted souls, where the heart is destitute of covenant graces. Alas, " the sacrifice of the wicked is abomination to God ; " * the great and jealous God challengeth the wicked man that hath not covenant mercies in his heart, for taking covenant promises into his mouth : " What hast thou to do ? " saith God ; † as if he had said, thou poor, graceless sinner, thou profanest my holy name, and provokest the eyes of my glory in the works and worship by which thou thinkest thou dost most honour and please me : in the state wherein thou art, I cannot endure to look towards thee ; I abhor thy offerings and performances, thy costly incense is a smoke in my nose ; I can see thy inward deformity through thy painted beauty ; thy gilded eloquence and rhetorical flourishes are no more to me than the roaring of bears or howling of dogs ; get out of my sight, thou sorry whining hypocrite ; all thy duties are ciphers, and signify nothing except the Mediator as the principal and only figure be set before them, and the Spirit of God write and indite them ; which

* Prov. xv. 8.

† Psalm l. 16, 17.

are two of the greatest mercies of the new covenant. Ah sirs, God doth despise the most melodious tunes of wicked men, but “a broken and contrite heart he despiseth not;” * that makes sweet music in his ear, for a broken heart is a covenant mercy. These mercies are brave ornaments to believing souls, and render them lovely and amiable in the sight of God. Every penitent tear is a rich pearl; every prayer pierceth heaven and fetcheth down abundant incomes from the throne of grace. O what a difference do these mercies make in persons, performances, and acceptance with God!

4. Without these mercies you have no solid ground of peace, comfort, or satisfaction: for without these you are not only under a sentence of condemnation, but you have no real ground to hope that the sentence shall not be executed this very hour; it is a wonder to think that graceless souls should be so merry that are suspended over the pit of hell, but by the brittle thread of a mortal life. O how suddenly may this precarious thing be broken, and they are gone for ever! for aught they know, when they go to bed, God may say, (as once he did to one as rich and secure as they are,) “This night shall thy soul be required from thee.” It is a wonder to me, how persons can rest quietly that are conscious to themselves, or have reason to suspect they are not in covenant with God; and so know not that they shall be another moment out of everlasting torments. But God leaves them to seared consciences; and Satan and the world join with their deceitful lusts to lull them asleep, till God awake them by true repentance or eternal vengeance. God, however, hath a time to shake the foundations of this bastard peace, and set the soul upon the sure bottom of covenant relation, and interest in Jesus Christ, which

* Psalm li. 17.

alone brings true content and comfort, peace that passeth understanding, joy in the Holy Ghost, and a sweet sabbath of refreshment to the agitated soul.* Here the assured believer may, as it were, terminate his desires, and make his strongest faculties expatiate upon his only portion—a covenant God ; and thence will result continual ground of triumph and exultation, for these mercies are suitable and adequate to the desires of the immortal soul, and will support it under the greatest outward pressures, and in the hour of death ; therefore I may conclude this exhortation with verse 2, of this chapter, —“ Wherefore do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.”

5. These mercies of the covenant will render your condition safe whatever befalls you ; we little know what may befall us betwixt this and the grave—who knows what a day will bring forth ? Man is born to trouble, a saint is born again to more ; bad news may come as Job’s messengers, treading in each other’s steps ; losses and crosses may occasion us sad discouragements. O but now to have a covenant God, a Saviour and all the fore-mentioned covenant blessings to solace the soul—what mercy will this be ! when the true Christian can say, “ I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine ; my flesh and my heart fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.” Let the sea roar, men rage, heavens look black, and earth tremble, I lie at anchor in a sure port, I trust in

* *Redite prævaricatores ad cor, et inhærete ei qui fecit vos : state cum eo et stabitis : requiescite in eo et quieti eritis. Quò itis in aspera ? quò itis ? bonum quod amatis ab illo est : sed quantum est ad illum bonum est et suave.—Vid. Aug. Conf. lib. 4. c. 12.*

God, and fear no evil tidings from below ; “ God is my refuge and help, yea my present help in time of trouble ;” * evils shall either miss me or mend me ; all winds blow my soul nearer my haven, all dispensations hitch me a step nearer heaven, for all things work together for my good ; my covenant God will teach me to profit by word and rod, by mercies and crosses, by ordinances and providences : God is my sun and shield, to enlighten me in times of darkness, to protect me in times of danger, he will command a guard of angels to attend me ; yea, his wings shall cover me, his comforts shall refresh my soul ; he will guide me here by his counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory. O happy man, that hath the God of Jacob for his God ; and these covenant mercies for his portion : who can hurt such a person ? But, oh the woful state of one that hath not the name of God as a tower or chamber to run unto when evils are approaching ! how dreadful was Saul’s state, when the Philistines were upon him and God had forsaken him ! just such will be condition of a soul destitute of covenant mercies in the day of public or personal calamity ; alas, all they bore up their carnal hearts with, is gone, and God is gone, and now their hearts either break with grief, or through despair they make themselves away, as Judas and Ahithophel. † Oh forlorn state of such as have not taken God for their God ! sirs, think seriously of these things.

6. These covenant mercies will have a mighty influence upon your spirits in God’s service, and in your conversation ; an interest in the mercies of the covenant will make you fear God, and tremble to offend so gracious a Being ; “ there is forgiveness with him, that he may be feared,” Psalm cxxx. 4 ; and fear to

* Psalm cxii. 7. Psalm xlvi. 1, 2.

† Psalm lii. 7.

offend God is itself one great mercy of the covenant. These mercies will melt your hearts into tears of evangelical repentance for offending God, as you may gather from Zech. xii. 10 ; brokenness of heart is also one of the mercies of the covenant. Sense of these mercies will make your souls love God supremely, Luke vii. 47, while love to God is itself another of the mercies of the covenant ; and so for the rest of the christian graces. There is not a useful disposition requisite to qualify us for God's service, but it is contained in the covenant ; hereby we shall know God's will, be willing to obey it, and delight ourselves in God's service, as David did, Psalm v. 7, " I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy, and in thy fear will I worship towards thy holy temple : " we shall then " sing in the ways of the Lord, and in the height of Zion, and flow together for the goodness of the Lord," Jer. xxxi. 12 ; that is, the goodness of the Lord will engage the saints to come with cheerfulness into God's presence, and thank him for an opportunity of enjoying the manifestations of his favour. Holy hearts delight in holy works ; grace fits the soul for God ; covenant mercies render a soul capable of and prepared for covenant duties ; and the more you partake of these mercies, the more delight will you take in duty ; the more like you are to God, the more delight will you take in God, and God will delight more in you, and so there will be sweet fellowship betwixt God and your souls. On the contrary, carnal spirits cannot endure spiritual exercises ; they come to duties as a bear to the stake, and when they are therein, they are upon a rack : Lord, be merciful to such a soul !

7. These covenant mercies will not leave the soul till they have brought it to heaven. God's mercies are in the heavens, that is their proper element ; and they

never cease moving and elevating the believer, till they they have raised him up into the highest heavens, where he shall “drink of the river of God’s pleasures,” Psalm xxxvi. 5, 8. *Now* covenanted souls do only taste that the Lord is gracious, but *then* they shall eat and drink abundantly, and shall be satisfied with marrow and fatness; yea, bathe their souls in “fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore,” Psalm xvi. 11; these mercies will make you rich towards God, and rich with God to all eternity; if you die with covenant mercies in your hearts, you depart like old Simeon with Christ in his arms, you die in peace, and rest, with God. These sure mercies lead the van to eternal glory, which comes in the rear of a temporal life and spiritual graces; yea, eternal life is begun here, as the the Scripture testifies—how is that? why, no otherwise than by the possession of these spiritual mercies, and communion with God thereby: “this is eternal life, to know the only true God and Jesus Christ.”—John xvii. 3. You lay hold on eternal life here, by laying hold on these best blessings and covenant mercies: * “he that hath the Son hath life,” and by believing on the name of the Son of God, he may know that he hath eternal life, for “he hath the record in himself.” See 1 John v. 10—13. What is the witness mentioned by the apostle? it is contained in some of these sure mercies of David. O, then, for a share and interest therein! On the other hand, he that hath nothing to do with these sure mercies, hath nothing to do with eternal glory; such as are strangers to the covenants of promise, have no hope of a better life; † “as the tree falls so shall it lie;” ‡ and such as are found without mercies in their hearts at death, shall be found destitute of mercy at the great day.

* 1 Tim. vi. 12, 19. † Eph. i. 12. ‡ Eccl. xi. 3.

There is one description of persons I would more particularly press to look after their share in these sure mercies of David, and those are the children of godly parents; and hence Solomon prays, "Remember the mercies of David thy servant."—2 Chron. vi. 42. So you that are the posterity of godly predecessors, be solicitous for and apply the mercies of your fathers; and there are two cogent arguments in the quality of these mercies which the text mentioneth, for here they are said to be sure; and you may consider, first, your parents found them sure to them; and secondly, the promise will make them sure to you.

1. Consider that your religious ancestors found these covenant mercies sure to their own souls. "Our fathers trusted in thee, cried to thee, they were delivered, they were not ashamed."—Psalm xxii. 4, 5. Heathens did pertinaciously adhere to the religion of their predecessors; and shall children of godly parents forsake their fathers' God? and such a God as never failed them. Moses in his song saith, "He is my God and I will prepare him a habitation; my father's God and I will exalt him."—Exod. xv. 2. Inquire and search, you that are the seed of his servants—had your fathers ever cause to complain of God? was he not as good as his word to them? did he not punctually keep engagements with them, and make good all his promises to them? did not your pious parents breathe their last with good speeches of God? did they not affectionately commend his service to you upon their death-bed? reflect upon their dying words; did they not proclaim to all the world, that God was a faithful covenant-keeping God to them? and did they not assure you he would be as good to you, if you embrace him and keep his ways? yea, cannot you bear witness for them, that their last words were employed in

speaking well of God, as Jacob and Joseph both did upon their death-bed? did they not in the faith and sense thereof commend you into the hands of their gracious God? as Jacob, Gen. xlviii. 15, 16, “The God which fed me all my life long unto this day; the angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads”——did they not express particular persuasions of some future mercy, as those blessed patriarchs, * “Behold, I die, but God shall be with you, and bring you again to the land of your fathers!” Yea, cannot you that are children bear your testimony for God, that he hath been and done according to your parents’ faith and hope? Solomon could say, after David’s death, “Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father, great mercy,” or bounty—but that is not all, “and thou hast kept,” saith he, “for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit upon his throne.”—1 Kings iii. 6. And I question not but many of you can say as much for God, that God hath had respect to you in temporal things, because you were the seed of such as were dear to him. O follow their steps, and you shall fare as they fared.

2. Yet further, you who are the children of pious parents, lie directly under the influences of these sure mercies; the promise is made to believers, and to their seed, † Gen. xvii. 7. Acts ii. 38, 39. such promises bear up the hearts of God’s poor expiring servants, concerning their surviving children. Well then, let children claim their interest, and plead this grant; none of you will lose your earthly inheritance for want of looking after it. If your landlord promise you a lease of your tenement after your father’s decease, on condition you sue

* Gen. xlviii. 21. and 1. 24.

† Isa. xlv. 3. and lix. 21. Exod. xx. 6. See 2 Sam. xxiii. 1—5. Acts iii. 25.

to him for it, and pay the accustomed fine, will you be so mad as to be turned out of your farm, and the heritage left by your fathers, rather than own your just and kind landlord according to the laws of the land? No man is so fond* in temporal things, and why should you be so foolish in spiritual? Ah Christians, look after your patrimony; despise not your birth-right; is it nothing to you to be born of believing parents? remember your parents' tears and prayers, their hopes and fears. O consider, how it comforted their hearts upon their death-beds, that they left you under a good covenant, and bequeathed to you a goodly heritage; and why should your parents be deceived in their hopes, and at the great day meet you strangers to God and Christ, to be set with filthy goats upon the left hand of the Judge? why will you barter, mortgage, or sin away this fair estate? why will you not in the court of heaven claim the privileges of this blessed character for your own souls? God is as willing to make them over to you, as ever he was to bestow them on your parents; he is loth to cut off his kindness from their seed; he looks after you in your soul-destroying practices; and saith, as once to Israel who did so woefully degenerate, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. What iniquity have your fathers found in me?"—Jer. ii. 2, 5. "I remember the kindness that in former times there was betwixt thy ancestors, and me. O their zeal in running after me, the holy services they did perform to me! Thy father, or grandfather, and some former generations, maintained intercourse with me, and I with them; there was love of espousals betwixt us, and I am sure I was not wanting

* Simple.

to them ; I looked carefully to them ; all that sought to devour them, were my enemies, and did offend me, and I brought evil upon them ; I pleaded their cause while they lived, and I took them seasonably to heaven, and if thou that art their offspring wouldest have put me to it, I would have done as much for thee ; if thou hadst but laid hold of that covenant, those very covenant mercies should have been thine, but thou art gone back, thou wilt have none of me, but walkest after new upstart vanities ; thou wilt not vouchsafe so much as to inquire after the God of thy fathers who was so faithful to them, and did so much for them : but let me ask thee since thou wilt needs leave me, what iniquity have either thy fathers or thou found in me ? produce thy reasons, testify against me, did I ever do thee any wrong ? have I not always done thee good ? Oh how unhappy thou art, whithersoever thou goest from me, thou missest of such a God as thy fathers served.”* God seems in that scripture to speak after this manner : O hearken to the eternal God, if you will not heed the dying words of your mortal parents, that died in the Lord ; though one would think those should move and melt your hearts into tears of gospel sorrow, why should your dear deceased parents rise up in judgment against you at the day of judgment ? when it shall be inquired whether they did their duty, they must needs answer according to truth, that they did instruct, correct, counsel, admonish their wandering prodigal children, they brought them to ordinances, prayed for them, wept and travailed again for them, and yet could not prevail ; and now must come in to bear witness against them, and must rejoice in God’s just vengeance upon them. Oh what a sad case will these rebellious children be in ! there is no pleading of privileges by

* A like Expostulation see in Mic. vi. 3, 4.

means of believing parents, at that day ; the higher you were advanced therein, the lower will you be cast down to hell.—Matt. xi. 23. Oh how terrible will it be to see godly parents in heaven, and themselves “ cast into outer darkness ;” yea, to see strangers, or the converted children of heathenish parents, “ come from east, and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven ;” but “ the children of the kingdom,” the posterity of covenant-ed parents, “ cast out into outer darkness.” See Matt. viii. 11, 12.

Let me therefore persuade all graceless children to look about them ; do you above all others beware of miscarrying ; greater expectations are from you than others ; the surviving friends of your religious ancestors look after you, and inquire what you do. O rejoice their hearts by walking in the steps of your predecessors ; I shall bespeak you, yea charge you, in the words of the Rev. Mr. Bolton upon his death-bed, that none of you will dare to meet us at the great tribunal in an unregenerate state. Let every child of pious parents plead for covenant mercies ; as once Solomon did, 2 Chron. i. 8, 9, “ Thou hast shewed great mercy unto David my father——now, O Lord God, let thy promise unto David my father be established :” thus do you plead with God, and say—Lord, my parents embraced the covenant, it was thy free grace to choose them, and set thy heart upon them ; and is that grace become weary ? canst thou not own me with covenant mercy ? nay, dost thou not call that mercy to Abraham by the surer name of truth unto Jacob ? am not I a child of the promise ?—Lord, cut not off the entail of covenant mercies from me or mine for ever.

But I must hasten—let all seek after a share in covenant mercies, you that are afar off, and you that

are near, children of the good and of the bad; draw nigh hither, take hold of this covenant; here is mercy for you all, these mercies are attainable. "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God for he will abundantly pardon."—Isa. lv. 7. They are mercies, fear not being made welcome; they are sure mercies, fear not disappointment: thou hast a tender of mercies, that is a mercy, yea, such a mercy as the fallen angels never had, nor ever shall have; and if thou refuse, thou dost not only neglect a great salvation, but the devils will rise up in judgment against thee: it is a wonder of mercies that thou hast run a wild course, yet there is hope if now thou come upon the call of mercy! all the condition God requires is acceptance of Christ and grace; you are invited, and if you wilfully reject mercy, what must save you? if you will perish, who can hinder you? you must thank yourselves for ever. The God of mercy stands waiting at your door, the Prince of peace purchased mercy at a dear rate, the Spirit of grace knocks and puts in his blessed finger at the hole of the door—will not your bowels yet move towards him? He that might with a word command you into hell, beseecheth you to be reconciled; and will you have no bowels of mercy towards your own souls? Ministers entreat, travail, study, weep, and earnestly beseech you for mercies' sake to come in:* and yet will you stand out? and must I after all this pains leave you short of mercy, these sure and sweet mercies? God forbid! however, remember you were warned.

* 2 Cor. v. 20. Rom. xii. 1.

CHAP. XI.

THE SURE MERCIES OF DAVID MAY SUGGEST VARIOUS DIRECTIONS.

VI. I SHALL proceed to offer some directions to sinners and saints, to which the consideration of the subject leads, and which may form a reply to the following inquiries :

1. What is a person to do that he may obtain an interest in these mercies ?

2. How a doubting Christian may be assured of these covenant mercies ?

3. In what cases may a believer improve covenant mercies ?

4. How a pious individual, that hath interest in these mercies is to behave himself ?

For the first, which concerns graceless characters, poor, unregenerate creatures; if any such inquire what they must do that they may have a part and portion in these sure mercies of David, I shall briefly propound these seven directions :

1. Make a strict inquiry into your state, diligently examine what title you have to the mercies of the covenant, practice this great and much neglected duty of self-trial—whether you have closed with the covenant? whether Christ be in you, or you be in Christ? * whether faith be in you, or you be in the faith? Self-knowledge is a good degree towards saving grace. Autology or self-knowledge, is the first step to theology. A man cannot, will not look after mercy till he know his own misery; they that conceit themselves to be something, deceive themselves; therefore, “let every man prove

* 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

his own work.”—Gal. vi. 3, 4. O how many thousands, with a vain hope, do descend into everlasting burnings! how many presume they have as good a title to mercy as any, and fall short of it! Mistakes on this point are dangerous and damning, therefore, sirs, try your title, be at a point concerning your state; some are children of wrath, and have not obtained mercy; yea, all are such by nature. That grace which changeth our title, changeth our dispositions, therefore deal faithfully with your own hearts. Ask them, whether they be renewed, changed, soundly converted? ask yourselves whether you be new creatures? Be not put off with silence or a slight answer; remember life and death depend on the resolution of this important question. You must be tried another day, you cannot evade God’s impartial search; only consider, there is no returning back to mend the matter, as you are found at the great day, so must you abide for ever; but here, if you find a flaw in your title, you may have it well repaired; and this is the first step to amendment of what is amiss, therefore get a distinct knowledge of your state.

2. Work on your hearts the misery of a soul’s being destitute of these sure mercies; yea, if upon serious examination you find that your souls have no interest therein, O consider what a dreadful, deplorable state your souls are in! you are, indeed, *lo-ruhamahs*, bond slaves of Satan, enemies to God, destitute of Christ, and have nothing to do with the good things of the gospel. Learn your state from the blessed apostle, or rather from the infallible dictates of the Holy Ghost: Ephes. ii. 12, “without Christ,” whatever confident claim you may lay to him, however you may boast of him, “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel,” that is, no members of the true church, though you may presumptuously

call and account yourselves the only sons of the church, you have nothing to do with the spiritual privileges, and sweet communion of saints; you are strangers from the covenants of promise, that is, you are not in this new covenant, but under that of works, and have not a right to any one promise, and so to no gospel mercy, consequently, without hope and without God in the world. The misery of a graceless sinner is inexpressible, yea, inconceivable; he is ready every moment to drop into hell; he must be shut out of heaven; God is angry with him every moment; Satan hath him in a string, leads him whither he list, and if he die this moment, he is gone for ever. O work on your hearts such sad thoughts as these! awake conscience, rouse up your affections, then cry out with the publican, striking on your breast, "God be merciful to me a sinner."* Woe is me, wretched creature that I am; what shall I do? I am undone, the guilt of sin is upon me, mercy is far from me; I have despised free grace, and now I may fear that mercy is turned into fury, that long forbearance will end in just vengeance. Oh is there any hope for a forlorn wretch? have not I worn out my day of grace? is there any hope for me? Surely, a little mercy will not serve my turn; I am a great sinner, yea, the chief of sinners; there must be a larger dole of mercy to me than others. Oh "what shall I do, men and brethren, what must I do to be saved?" Thus, sirs, bemoan your state. It is not a saying all are sinners, and God is merciful, that will serve the turn, but you must be sick of sin, then you will desire a physician, else you will slight and scorn both Christ and the covenant of God, with all the mercies thereof.†

3. Be thankful for, but be not content with, common mercies; they are good in their kind, and for their

* Luke xviii. 13.

† Matt. ix. 12, 13.

use and purposes, but they are not suitable to, nor sufficient for, the soul. A Christian should be content with any thing in the world, yet content with nothing in the world; the worst of the world doth please a believer along with God, the best of it cannot, should not please him without God; you must look on these things as good in the way for a staff or bait, but not good as a centre or end, to terminate your thoughts upon. Remember, the worst of men may have the best of these blessings, yet have them with a curse, and may perish with them; therefore, say as David, Psalm cxix. 132, "Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name;" and elsewhere he desires to be remembered with the favour of God's people; * as if he should say, and every believer may adopt the same language: Lord, there are common mercies which fill the belly, clothe the back, supply outward wants, but these thou givest to the bad as well as good; and though these are more than I deserve, yet more than these I desire; these will only serve me the day and date of my temporal life, and will take their leave of me at death; but Lord, thou hast better mercies to bestow than these, even such as will adhere to me in life and death; mercies that concern the soul, such as thou bestowest on children, and on heirs of promise. O let me come in for a child's part of those, and put me not off with any else; none besides will fit or fill my precious soul, or serve my turn. I must say, as once the children of Joseph said to Joshua, "why hast thou given me but one lot and one portion to inherit, seeing I am a great people?" † So must I say, if I were a brute creature, one lot of provender for this body would serve me, but seeing I am blessed with a noble, never-dying soul, that hath large capacious faculties, I must have a dou-

* Psalm cvi. 4.

† Josh. xvii. 14.

ble portion, a single share is not enough—something that will live when this body is laid in the grave, and nothing is so fit for this immortal soul, as these sure mercies of David. O that I had my share thereof! more than these I cannot reasonably desire, expect, or enjoy, and less than these my soul is not content withal.

4. Cast out and cashier all sin, break off your sinful league with impure lusts. These sure mercies will not lodge in a foul breast; where Christ takes up his habitation, sin hath not dominion. God and sin go contrary ways—mercies mount the soul upwards, corruption pulls the soul downwards; you must be separate, and touch no unclean thing, if you would be received and embraced as children, and have God for your Father, 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18. Be you sure “the throne of iniquity hath no fellowship with God,” and God will challenge such as hate instruction, and wilfully run into sin, and will say, “what hast thou to do—to take my covenant in thy mouth;”* do not think to yoke Christ and Belial, God will not be merciful to any wicked, persevering transgressor; do not think to divide mercies and faithfulness; make account to enjoy mercies only in the way of truth, that you may be able to say as David, Psalm cxix. 41, “Let thy mercies come also unto me, O Lord, even thy salvation, according to thy word;” as if he had said, O Lord, thou hast mercies to bestow, and thou hast told me, how and to whom thou wilt distribute these mercies; it is to such as fear and love and obey thee, and devote themselves to thee. Why, here I am, I have served sin and Satan too long, now I abhor the ways in which my soul hath delighted, I abandon works of darkness, I cut off a right-hand sin, and pluck out a right-eye lust, and now I am in the road of mercy, not as though this merited thy favour,

* Psalm xciv. 20. Psalm l. 16—18.

but as a condition absolutely necessary in the souls of such as obtain mercy, according to the precepts and promises of the word ;* and now though I cannot challenge mercy, yet I humbly plead thy promise for mercy, even covenant mercies ; I have forsaken my sinful ways and wicked thoughts ; “ O be merciful to me according to thy word ! ” † O entertain me, and then I shall not lose but change my pleasures, the sensual pleasures of the flesh, for a solid, sacred, and soul-satisfying delight in Christ and grace ! Thus renounce sin, and you shall have what is infinitely better ; but that is not all.

5. Renounce your own righteousness, and look after these sure mercies only for mercy's sake ; the wise merchant parted with all, not only his worldly enjoyments, but self-conceited thoughts of his own righteousness, for this pearl of price ; ‡ deny yourselves then, enjoy God, mercy is slighted when you dream of merit ; the poor Jews that sought to establish their own righteousness, would not submit to the righteousness of God, Rom. x. 3 ; they had something of their own to lean to, they scorned God's way of saving sinners ; they would not be beholden to God's mercy, and so went without. The poor publican was justified, but the proud Pharisee condemned ; come as importunate beggars, not as rich purchasers ; say as David, “ save me for thy mercies' sake,” Psalm vi. 4, as if he had said, Lord, I am a weak, worthless, wicked creature, if thou mark iniquity who can stand ? I am not worthy of one crumb of kindness, most worthy of thy fiercest displeasure ; if thou condemn me thou art righteous—if thou save me thou art infinitely gracious. Lord, when thy wrath is ready to wax hot, and justice prompts thy hand to strike the fatal blow, then reflect upon thy working bowels of

* Isaiah i. 16—18, and lv. 7.

† Psalm cxix. 58.

‡ Matt. xiii. 46.

tender mercy, and stop thy hand from a righteous execution of thy justly deserved sentence of condemnation, “Remember thy tender mercies and thy loving kindnesses, for they have been ever of old—Remember not the sins of my youth nor my transgressions, according to thy mercy remember thou me, for thy goodness’ sake, O Lord.” Thus a good man pleads with God, Psalm xxv. 6, 7, and thus do thou come empty-handed, “buy wine and milk without money and without price.” Mercy were not mercy if it were bought at a valuable rate; but as that is not possible, so that soul which comes to purchase shall be dealt without, for all the good things of the gospel are of free and undeserved gift.

6. Close with Jesus Christ the root and spring of these covenant mercies. I told you in the doctrinal part, these mercies are made sure in and by Christ to all the heirs of promise. Would you then enjoy the benefit of these mercies, accept of Jesus Christ in the exercise of a sound and lively faith. You can expect no mercy but through a Mediator, “grace and truth come by Jesus Christ.”* All mercy is laid up in Christ, as the great storehouse, and is to be fetched out by faith; those souls are under a dangerous and soul-destroying mistake that imagine God to be any other ways merciful than in Christ. “It is even dreadful,” saith Luther, “to think of God out of Christ;” this is the only gospel way of obtaining mercy. God blesseth us with these spiritual blessings in Christ, and we are accepted in the beloved.† Well then, how have poor souls interest in Christ? This is only by faith, which is the soul’s accepting of him upon his own terms.‡ Here, I must not digress into the spacious field of that useful subject, saving faith; but must refer you to the large dis-

* John i. 17.

† Eph. i. 3, 6.

‡ John i. 12.

courses composed on this radical, fundamental grace, and I beseech you, be not mistaken in this; here you have the hinge and vital source of religion, even in an entire, affectionate, voluntary, and universal accepting of Jesus Christ, as our King, Priest, and Prophet, to be ruled, guided, and saved by him in his own way. O sirs, if you do not this, you do nothing; if you believe, you shall be saved, but if you believe not you shall be damned,* that is plain English; and truly, my friends, all men have not faith, this faith of the operation of God, this precious faith. O, therefore, look after it, long for it; come with a broken heart to a bleeding Saviour; come weary and heavy laden, and lay your load on the Son of God; come with a troubled, humbled heart, wounded with a sense of sin, and look up to this brazen serpent for help and healing; reach out thy trembling hand and get hold of the skirt of his garment, or rather with old Simeon embrace Jesus Christ in the arms of thy faith, and then thou hast these mercies of the covenant.

7. Enter into a solemn covenant with the Lord; there is no way to be interested in the mercies of the covenant, but by entering into covenant. This, this is the work I would persuade your souls unto; this, indeed, is the life of religion, which is so called [*a religando*] from binding, because it binds, as it were, God and man together, and joins their interests in this blessed bond of the covenant. O, therefore, set yourselves to enter into a solemn engagement.† Give up yourselves to the Lord, openly profess that you are the Lord's, or else subscribe with your hand, and yield up yourselves to the Lord, to whom, of right, you do belong, and take God as your God; say, "the Lord our God will

* Mark xvi. 16.

† 2 Cor. viii. 5. Isaiah xlv. 5. 2 Chron. xxx. 8.

we serve, and his voice will we obey,"* as the people of Israel once did; and thus do you make a covenant this day—lift up your hand to the most high God, as once Jacob did, who made a vow, saying, "if God will be with me and keep me in this way that I go—then shall the Lord be my God."—Gen. xxviii. 20, 21. Now consider, friends, hath not God done as much for you as Jacob here desires, or even more? and why should you not take God for your God? Say thus: I have heard of the Lord's goodness, nay, I have experienced a large share of his kindness and compassion; he hath done that for me, which none else could, and hath undertaken to do yet much more; and, therefore, God forbid that I should cleave to any other God all my days, as I would be wholly the Lord's, so I will have only the Lord, and as he is the only true God, so he shall be my God. This is that which the Scripture calls avouching the Lord to be our God, and if we avouch him to be our God, he will avouch us to be his people, Deut. xxvi. 17, 18, which imports the mutual conditions of this blessed covenant, even a reciprocal embracing and accepting each other; the saints take God to be theirs by the saving grace of faith, and God receives them by a gracious act of favour, love and condescension; only be sure you remember that the articles of agreement are of God's own framing, and the soul must come up wholly unto his terms, else no engagement; God will not abate any thing of his appointed conditions, it must be sincere faith, though it be but weak, which empties the soul of sin, and self, and turns wholly to God, and doth resign up itself universally, voluntarily, and perpetually to be the Lord's; and in the same manner the believer takes God to be his, and looks upon this as his mercy, as well as his

* Josh. xxiv. 24. 25.

duty—his highest preferment, as well as his greatest concern, and sweetest enjoyment. O, thinks a pious soul, that I could be more the Lord's than I am. I am too much my own; but I will enter into the strictest engagement to be only for God, and not for another,* then I may expect he would be for me; and O that I could take the Lord wholly for mine, and only as mine, and join no other lovers with him; I need none but him, he is all-sufficient, and my exceedingly valuable and great reward. Upon this condition God takes you, and you shall gain by him, and the gospel covenant, and all the mercies of it; if you be not willing to “forsake all for him, you are not worthy of him;”† but I shall spend no more time about this, because so many have written on a soul's covenanting with God. See Mr. Baxter's *Saint's Rest*, part 1, p. 176—182, *et alibi passim*. Mr. Guthrie, Mr. Allen, and Mr. Vincent have prescribed directions and a form of words for a solemn covenant with God.

Secondly, How may a doubting Christian assure himself of these covenant mercies? Many pious souls may have an interest in these, yet not be assured of their interest, which, however, is of great consequence and concernment, though not to the being, yet to the well-being of a Christian; therefore, we are commanded to give diligence “to make our calling and election sure,” 2 Pet. i. 10, not in respect of God, say interpreters,‡ with whom all things are firm and invariable, but in respect of others, say some, that those with whom we live may see the tree is good, because the fruits are good; but I rather take it, that we must labour to clear these up to our own souls, that we may have some real, well-grounded assurance thereof in our hearts, and both these are mercies included in the gos-

* Hos. iii. 3. † Matt. x. 37. Luke xiv. 28, 29. ‡ Vit. Argt. in loc.

pel covenant. Only take notice that calling is before election, there we must begin, and so ascend from the work of grace in our hearts to the workings of grace in God's heart, for our love is a reflection of his love to us. Grace is a fruit of election; this, then, is a weighty case of conscience. Suppose a real Christian to be dark and doubtful about his state, and to be full of questionings and disputings whether these sure mercies of the covenant do belong to him. What must such a person do that he may be assured of his interest therein, and that they may indeed be sure to him? Now for answering this question, I shall propose these directions:*

1. Study the precepts, promises, and precedents in the Scriptures; be diligent in reading the word of God. O, of what use would this be! There you may find what God commands, how saints have obeyed, by what means they have manifested their integrity and interest in Christ; here you may find what are the conditions of the covenant, and upon what terms the mercies thereof may be enjoyed, and what are the infallible characters of such as have received benefit thereby; here you may find Christ the main and choicest mercy of the covenant; yea, for this end were the Scriptures written, that we might have comfort in God, and by consequence also, assurance of our interest in him. Rom. xv. 4. For this reason did Christ speak, and John write divine truths, † which are upon record, that the joy of our Redeemer might be in us; yea, that our joy might be full. An express text you have in 1 John v. 13, "These things have I written unto you, that believe

* See this point handled solidly in a Treatise called, "A Believer's Duty towards the Spirit," &c. on Ephes. iv. 30. Read 6th Direct. page 158—183. See Baxt. 32 Directions.

† John xv. 11. 1 John i. 4.

on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know ye have eternal life." The more you study the Scriptures, the more clearly you may read your names in the book of life; your hearts, if sincere, will echo to the word you read, because the law of God is written in your hearts, therefore read and study this blessed book; these words form a charter of your heavenly inheritance, food for your hungry appetites, glasses in which you may discern the complexion of your souls. O Christians, neglect not the Scriptures, look up for a right understanding, and due application of every passage therein, and then comfort yourselves, and one another with these words.—1 Thess. iv. ult.

2. Attend upon a lively ministry; here the terms of the gospel are propounded—the mercies of the covenant are displayed—true believers discovered and characterized; here you may meet with a Barnabas as well as with a Boanerges; yea, it may be, the hand that wounded may heal you. God usually makes the fruit of the lips to be peace,* and many times sends some choice interpreter to declare unto a man his righteousness, and clear up his integrity; † and therefore it is, that God directs all such as walk in darkness to obey the voice of his servants, ‡ or rather gives this as their character that they do so; and God gives ministers a charge to comfort his people, || and lays up such comforts in their breasts to this end, that they may comfort such as are cast down. § O the reviving words, you may hear in the ministry of the word! Here you may have doubts resolved, cases of conscience proposed and answered, also hearts opened and anatomized; here the Spirit of God is often conveyed which seals up the

* Isaiah lvii. 19.

† Job xxxiii. 23.

‡ Isaiah l. 10.

|| Isaiah xl. 1, 2.

§ 2 Cor. i. 4.

believing soul to the day of redemption. * The presence of God accompanies his institution, so that what the minister declares in the name and by the authority of Christ, according to the word he will ratify, second and confirm in heaven ; † and how many drooping heirs of promise hath God raised, satisfied, and encouraged about their title to covenant mercies by this ordinance ? O the advantage that many have got thereby ! therefore wait on God in this ordinance. O look not upon it as one of the weak and beggarly elements, as some ignorantly and blasphemously call all ordinances. Make them not a matter of ceremony and formality, but prepare for them and attend on them conscientiously, and you shall see the delightful effects thereof.

3. Improve the seals of the covenant, both baptism and the Lord's supper. Circumcision is called the seal of the righteousness of faith, ‡ because this sweet evangelical privilege, or marrow of the gospel covenant was signified, sealed and exhibited in that ordinance. O Christians, understand and improve the encouraging ordinance of baptism, it would be a spring of sweetness and satisfaction to your doubting, fainting spirits ; and then, for the Lord's supper, herein Christ's body and blood are particularly applied to us, to become our own ; yea, verily and really, though not corporeally, but spiritually, exhibited to every worthy receiver ; || and hence, resulteth spiritual joy, solace and satisfaction, as in the passover in Hezekiah's days, " they kept the feast with gladness and there was joy in Jerusalem." § But be sure you examine yourselves, prepare your hearts, excite your graces, understand the covenant,

* Isaiah lix. 21. Gal. iii. 2, 3. Ephes. iv. 30.

† Isaiah xlv. 26. Matt. xviii. 18.

‡ Rom. iv. 11.

|| 1 Cor. x. 16, and xi. 24.

§ 2 Chron. xxx. 21—26.

apply these blessed mysteries to your own souls, open your hearts by meditation that the King of glory may come in, stir up your souls to God, and he will draw near to you ; you will see Christ crucified before you,* you will enjoy a blessed feast of fat things, that will nourish and comfort your pining souls ; here you will find pleasant apples and sweet flagons of the wine of his special love to refresh you and support your hearts in the day of your affliction, and sad desertion ; and if you cannot enjoy that reviving ordinance, yet reflect upon your former enjoyments, meditate upon your crucified Redeemer, and represent his bruised body and effused blood to yourselves, and in due time you will cry out with Thomas, “ my Lord and my God.”

4. Frequent the throne of grace in the exercise of prayer ; say as David, Psalm xxxv. 3, “ O Lord, say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.” God hath promised to make his people joyful in the house, or duty, of prayer. † Saints have found by experience the sweet and satisfying fruit of serious wrestling with God. Thus David prays, Psalm xxxi. 16, “ make thy face to shine upon thy servant,” and verse 21, he breaks out in thankfulness for an answer, “ Blessed be the Lord, for he hath shewed me his marvellous kindness in a strong city.” Yea, Christ himself commands us to ask that we may receive that our joy may be full, John xvi. 24, and is not a clear evidence of our interest in the covenant, and the mercies of it worth asking ? therefore, plead with God ; tell him thou preferrest covenant mercies above worldly enjoyments, and that thou wouldst rather have those mercies made sure to thee than to have a lease of thy life, for his “ loving-kindness is better than life.” ‡ Tell him the joy of the Lord is thy strength, and how much it will tend to thy

* Gal. iii. 1.

† Isaiah lvi. 7.

‡ Psalm lxiii. 3.

furtherance in his service, if he will lift up the light of his countenance on thy soul ; tell him he hath granted comfortable assurance to many souls, and thou needest it as well as they ; thou art an humble suitor at the gates of mercy, and art resolved not to let him go, except he bless thee ; yet once again, tell him, it is no more than he hath promised in his word, and Christ hath purchased by his blood ; and, therefore, it is no arrogancy for thee to crave or expect, and when thou hast been pleading, conclude with that poor man in the gospel, “ Lord I believe, help thou my unbelief,”* and he will say, “ according to thy faith be it unto thee.”†

5. Walk closely with God. As that is one of the mercies of the covenant, so it is an evidence of our interest in the covenant, and it is a notable means of obtaining and maintaining assurance ; Psalm l. 23, “ to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.” Close walkers have many choice discoveries. O the peace that such have as keep God’s commandments ! ‡ O the sweet refreshment which results from a lively obedience ! “ The work of righteousness is peace, the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever.”—Isa. xxxii. 17. If you keep constantly in the fear of God, he will discover to you the secrets of his covenant, he will cause the sun of righteousness to arise upon you ; if you keep his commandments, you shall have a comforter, and he will manifest himself to you ; || but if you grow careless, and remiss in your walking, and step aside to any gross sin, no wonder if you have little assurance of these covenant mercies ; for these do separate betwixt you and your God, you and comfort. This obscured David’s interest

* Mark ix. 24. † Matt. ix. 29. ‡ Psalm cxix. 165.

|| Psalm xxv. 14. Mal. iv. 2. John xiv. 16, and xvi. 13.

in God, and his inconsistent acts cost him many a tear, and sad thoughts of heart, which made him cry out of broken bones, and bitterly groan out his sad complaints for the want of the joy of God's salvation; yea, for one act of sloth and security, the church lost the sweet sense of divine love.—Cant. v. 6. O beware of sin, it is like a filthy vapour rising out of the soul, that causeth a mist, and such a thick mist between God and us, as will keep the light of his countenance from shining upon us—it begets jealousies, suspicions and uncomfortable fears in the soul whether God be ours or not, and, therefore, beware of sin, and walk humbly with God.

6. Be much in self-observation. Some have an interest in the covenant, but know it not for want of self-discovery; therefore, it were a good work to consider both your hearts and ways; indeed, the heart is deceitful, but you should have the candle of the word in the hand of conscience, and deal impartially with your hearts; seek into the obscure corners thereof, and it is possible, in some nook or other, you will find a covenant mercy. Canst thou not say as Peter in sincerity, “thou knowest that I love thee!”* or with Hezekiah, that you have walked before God in uprightness?† Dost thou not find in thy heart a care to please God, a fear to offend him, a desire to enjoy him, a hatred of sin, a love to the saints, poverty of spirit, a despising of the world, and low thoughts of thy best duties? Well now, a sound search, and clear discovery of the frame of your spirits will be an admirable way to confirm to yourselves your interest in these covenant mercies, and so proving yourselves, your rejoicing and satisfaction shall be from yourselves.‡ If thou canst but

* John xxi. 17.

† Isaiah xxxviii. 3.

‡ Gal. vi. 4. Prov. xiv 14.

find one saving grace in thy heart in truth, thou mayest gather some evidence thence ; God's children have taken comfort from their sincere love to the brethren, when they have scarce discerned any other grace, and so have assured their hearts before God that they were " of the truth," see 1 John iii. 18, 19 ; there is never a good work done, if it be right for principle, rule and end, but it will help us to a discovery of our state, that our work is " wrought in God," John iii. 21 ; therefore, let us be willing to come to the light, and try our hearts and acts ; so may we attain assurance of our interest.

7. Reflect upon, and recollect your former experience. This was David's usual method, to assure his heart of the truth of grace, and his interest in God, Psalm lxxvii. 10, " I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High ;" also the " days of old ;"* hence " his songs in the night."† This course took Job,‡ and many other saints ; and the apostle bids the believing Hebrews " call to remembrance the former days, in which, after they were illuminated, they endured a great fight of afflictions, Heb. x. 32, and this was in order to the recovery of God's smiles, and the sense of his love. You will say, what am I better for remembering what goodness was in me in time past, which I am now fallen from and have lost ? I answer, much every way, chiefly because these mercies of the covenant are sure mercies, and though they may be obscured, yet they are never abolished, " where God loves once, he loves to the end."—John xiii. 1. The bud and blossom of comfort may be nipped, but the root of the matter and incorruptible seed remain in the heart ; || a man in a swoon hath life though possibly

* Psalm cxliii. 5, 6. † Psalm lxxvii. 6. ‡ Job xxiii. 11, 12.

|| Job xix. 28. 1 Pet. i. 23.

it is not discernible to himself or others; grace may be hid, yet alive, as the sap returns into the root in winter; want of comfortable sense and feeling is not a loss of grace—in this case search your records, and see if you cannot find some manifestations of God to your souls in former times. I have heard of a pious woman, who was wont to write down how God dealt with her heart, also time, place, and manner of her communion with God. A time of distress came, the comforts and counsels of ministers and friends were in vain; a good man gets her book, shews it under her own hand, which she could not deny, asserts and evinces the immutable love of God, constantly reminds her of it, and rivets conviction as it takes place. Thus she recovered her assurance; thus you may, and should recollect experiences.

8. Strengthen every grace. The greater any thing is, the more it is discernible; little grace is not so soon discovered as much grace; a greater measure of the graces of the Spirit carries a beauty and lustre along with it, and hath a self-evidencing testimony of the soul's sincerity. Christians, do you add to your faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity; for if these things be in you and abound, you shall both be fruitful, and they will help you to clear up "your calling and election."—2 Pet. i. 5—10. These make the soul to resemble God, and the more God-like a Christian grows, the more certain will he be in reference to his state. Saints of the greatest attainments are usually more free from doubts than others; whilst sincere, yet weak believers, are much pestered with jealousies and misgivings; the more you get of these sure mercies into your hearts, the more sure you are of your interest in them; the faster hold you have of God, the surer you will be that

you have, indeed, hold of him; every step towards Zion will add new strength, stability and satisfaction to the holy pilgrim; increase repentance, and you increase assurance of the remission of sins; increase faith, and that brings on assurance of faith; strengthen hope, and you settle your anchor; grow in love to God and his ways, in courage and zeal for God, in humility and self-denial, and hereby you will evidence to your own souls and others, that these mercies of the covenant belong to you, for so saith the apostle, “the Lord make you to increase and abound in love—to the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God,” 1 Thess. iii. 12, 13; if you have more grace, you may probably have more comfort.

9. Rest the confidence of your souls upon free grace. The more you mix any conceits of your own righteousness, the more you will stagger, and be disconsolate; let free grace be your foundation, and build upon nothing in yourselves, for your best graces, duties, and excellencies are imperfect and can afford you little solid satisfaction. Let Jesus Christ be all in all to you, be you nothing at all in yourselves. O how God loves to see a poor trembling soul, despairing of any thing in itself, accounting the world as loss and dross, flying into the outstretched arms of free grace, casting itself down at his feet, and resolving to venture every thing upon an all-sufficient Saviour, and though at present it walk in darkness, yet it will cast anchor in the dark, “and trust in the name of the Lord.” * You shall see, in due time, the mists will be dispelled, and the soul’s state clearly ascertained, and the troubled heart fully satisfied. Thus David † expected to recover the light of God’s countenance, and banish disquieting thoughts, even by trusting in God, Psalm xlii. 5—12; mercy will

* Isaiah l. 10.

† See Psalm xxxiii. 20—22.

answer all your doubts and scruples—mercy will suit your necessities—mercy will revive and cheer troubled spirits; therefore, poor doubting Christian, though thou canst find no goodness in thyself, and therefore lookest on thyself as utterly unworthy, yea, incapable of interest in covenant mercies, yet hope in God's mercy. Let no muddy current of thy duties mix with the pure stream of free undeserved mercy, and as that will carry thy soul apace to the ocean of glory, so it will bring many sweet, refreshing streams of joy and peace into thy heart. We have instances of many in the word that judged themselves most unworthy of good, as in themselves, yet expected and received both mercy and assurance thereof for mercy's sake—as the “centurion, woman of Canaan,”* and others; because as mercy is free, so these covenant mercies are purchased and ensured by Jesus Christ, the mediator of the covenant, and therefore, though there be no goodness in men to procure these mercies, yet there is enough in their surety, and as their sins are made over to him, so what good is in Christ, is made over to the believing soul, 1 Cor. i. 30—here is the marrow of the gospel; and farther, the less goodness a humbled sinner finds in himself, the greater evidence hath he that these mercies belong to him, because he finds even such persons particularly invited and received.† Yea, humility, self-denial and poverty of spirit are mercies of the covenant, and do evidence interest.

10. Attend much to the duties which thankfulness prescribes, give God praise, and he will give you more grounds of praise; bury not his mercies in the grave of forgetfulness, especially bless him for covenant mercies. Alas, saith the soul, if I were sure I had an in-

* Matt. viii. 8, and xv. 27.

† Isaiah lv. 1. Matt. v. 3. Rom. iv. 5.

terest in these covenant mercies, then I could sing to God's praise, and be very thankful; but how can I praise him for that which I question whether it belong to me, or not? I answer, thou must bless God that there are such mercies in store for poor sinners, and that any have obtained an interest therein, and are carried to heaven thereby; bless God that you are under a call and capacity to enjoy these covenant mercies, that God hath not excluded, but included you in the universal tender of them; consider also, if you have not cause to bless God, that he hath been dealing with your souls in such a manner as he is wont to do with those whom he brings into covenant with himself. Hath he not humbled, broken, and brought your hearts off from your own grounds of dependence? Hath he not let you see a vanity in the world, and the excellency and necessity of Christ? Hath he not caused longings and pantings in your souls after these mercies? and doth not all this deserve your thankfulness? But know further, that thankfulness for what you have is a most effectual way to clear up your title and to beget assurance; praise raiseth the soul's faculties to a high pitch of joy and comfort; it is like David's harp, to banish away the evil spirit of disquietness or discouragement. Your praise should wait for God, and you will find God waiting to be gracious to you; * usually a thankful heart is a cheerful heart; you may sing yourselves out of your sorrows, as David did frequently: he made a song of these mercies of the covenant, even then when he could find little comfort in, or benefit from, these covenant mercies in many respects: compare Psalm lxxxix. 1. with verse 38, &c. Thus do you, Christians, sing yourselves into this blessed composure, and soul tranquillity. It is the

* Psalm lxxv. 1. Isaiah xxx. 18.

fault of doubting Christians, that they pore all upon their sins, and forget their mercies, they think they can never be sufficiently bathed in the tears of repentance, or torture their hearts with doubtful thoughts, but consider not that a thankful commemoration of mercies is as well their duty as mourning and humiliation; yea, it is a sweet, heart-cheering, God-pleasing duty; therefore let Christians be much in this duty as a means of assurance. I shall add a word or two to excite all to press after a particular assurance of interest in these mercies of the covenant.

1. Christians may be assured of their interest, we are commanded to make it sure, many pious people have arrived at a plerophory or full assurance;* experience proves the truth of this; God himself hath promised joy and comfort to such as “ask it,” it is the great office of the Spirit “to seal the souls of believers to the day of redemption;”† yea, the Scriptures were written to promote our comfort and assurance, seals of the covenant were instituted, ordinances and ministers were appointed for this very purpose—and shall we slight this infinite condescension of God who is so forward to help us? shall we use no means or endeavours to ensure these mercies to our souls? Oh ungrateful creatures! If it were a thing unattainable, we might be daunted; but how many gracious souls do we see and hear of, that do walk in the light of God’s countenance, and triumph over all opposition in the sense of God’s love? And one great reason why many of us are so full of doubts, is our neglect of God’s appointed

* 2 Pet. i. 10.

† John xvi. 24. Eph. i. 13. Rom. xv. 4. It is promised—See Isaiah lx. 16. Saints have attained to it—Job xix. 25. Psalm lxiii. 1. Gal. ii. 20. 1 John iii. 14. and v. 19. Cant. ii. 16. Isaiah xlv. 24, 25.

means for the obtaining of assurance ; for if it be attainable in the use of ordinary means, we sin exceedingly against God and our own souls in neglecting those means of assurance.

2. You cannot evidence the truth of grace, or your title to covenant mercies, unless you use God's appointed means to obtain assurance. It is an ill sign of a graceless heart to nourish doubtings and distrusts, and then to come in with such pleas as these :—" True faith is accompanied with doubtings ; he that doubts not, doth not believe ; a doubting faith is a good faith ; let me have doubts and fears, I dare not be too confident, lest I presume." But I must tell thee, soul, a doubting faith is but a weak faith, and a Christian ought " to be strong in faith,"* and make progress to a full degree and proficiency in grace, and endeavour to arrive at this full assurance, for this is the nature of grace to be pressing after perfection, and to " go from faith to faith,"† even from a faith of adherence to a faith of evidence and assurance ; yea, let such as slight means of assurance know this—that they live in a constant neglect of a known duty, in disobedience to a flat command, Heb. vi. 11, " And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end ;" as if he had said, if your faith and hope be of the right stamp, as it may seem to be, it will be working off all doubtings, anxious thoughts, and distrusting fears, and move to a further degree of confidence and assurance ; else you may suspect the truth of it.

3. You cannot assure yourselves of creature enjoyments a day to an end, nor yet of immunity from crosses ; and if you have not assurance of these covenant mercies, what have you to bear up your hearts in

* Rom. iv. 20.

† Rom. i. 17.

an evil day? We little know what shaking times may come, that may tear from you whatever you account dear; and if you have not something above, oh the sad confusions that will seize upon you! but assurance of an interest in the God of heaven, and the good things of the covenant will be a guard to free your hearts from those numerous armies of tormenting fears that will beset you; this will be a cordial to drive away sick and swooning qualms from your troubled spirits; assurance of God's love will fortify your hearts against the fierce assaults of men and devils; Psalm xxvii. 1, "The Lord is my light and salvation, whom shall I fear?" destroying angels shall not come near any persons that are sprinkled with Christ's blood, and have the mourner's mark.* A day of danger, horror, and confusion may overtake us in the nation, in which we may be stript naked of all our enjoyments—surely then assurance of our interest in the best riches in the world, will stand us in stead, and when all things else fail, these will abide with us. But,

4. Consider the great advantages of assurance, I can but name them.

(1.) It will assure us that we shall want nothing that is good for us; "if God have given us Christ, then will he give us all good things."—Rom. viii. 32.

(2.) It gives a sweet relish to every comfort of life, and causes "delight in God's great goodness."—Neh. ix. 25.

(3.) It will sweeten the "bitterest cup of affliction."—Matt. ix. 2.

(4.) It encourages us to come "with boldness to the throne of grace," Heb. iv. 16, *μετὰ παρρησίας*, that is, with a liberty to say what we list if according to his will, and he will hear us.

* Exod. xii. 23. Ezek. ix 6.

(5.) Assurance helps the soul to despise the world; he that knows he is clothed with the sun, can trample the moon under his feet.—Heb. x. 34.

(6.) It strengthens the mind against the censures and reproaches of men,* no matter what men say when God acquits, Rom. viii. 33, 34; our conscience tells us we are not the men we are represented to be.

(7.) It enhances the reading of the word, and receiving of the sacraments, the promises, seals, and blood of the covenant: precepts of Scripture, ministers, things present and things to come, all are the believer's.—1 Cor. iii. 21, 22.

(8.) It enlargeth the soul in praise and thanksgiving; hence those hallelujahs in heaven: the more assurance, the more thankfulness.—Psalm ciii. 1—3.

(9.) It commendeth religion to others, makes God's ways lovely: "O taste and see that the Lord is good, come and I will shew you what he hath done for my soul," engageth many.—Psalm cxlii. 7. and lxvi. 16.

(10.) It helpeth on repentance, makes godly sorrow more kindly and evangelical; a look of love from Christ melts Peter's heart—this sun dissolves frozen souls.—Ezek. xvi. 63.

(11.) It engageth the soul against sin; manifestations of God are cords of love, which are strongest to an ingenuous spirit.—Rom. vi. 1, 2.

(12.) Assurance animates our performances and obedience; is any thing too much to do for God? yes, my God deserves all I am and have, his commands are not grievous.—1 John v. 3.

(13.) It deadens the heart to needless disputes and controversies; it settles the mind in an attachment to the truth, and fortifies it against the subtilties of seduc-

* 1 Pet. iv. 14, 16.

ing spirits, for "God's law is in the hearts of his people."—Heb. xiii. 9.

(14.) It representeth the glory of heaven, and is a blessed emblem of a soul's bathing itself in those rivers of pleasure that are at God's right hand, while it opens a Pisgah sight of the celestial Canaan.

(15.) It disarms the king of terrors, and plucks out the sting of death; so that a gracious soul, assured of God's love, can triumph with Paul over this conquered enemy.—1 Cor. xv. 55.

And indeed none but an assured Christian can look death in the face without dread and amazement. Ruffing gallants may be prodigal of their lives, when they are far from any capacity of obtaining assurance, but those are more like brutes than men, who are guided by sense, not by reason, and consider not that their souls are immortal, and that they enter into eternity at death; hence they have drowned themselves in sensuality, and consider not what they do. It is only the Christian that is upon good grounds assured of his good estate, who can in cold blood adventure upon death, yea, be willing to die, even desire "to be dissolved and be with Christ."

I have but hinted at these things, because it is an ordinary subject on which many have done worthily to promote endeavours to obtain assurance.

Sirs, what say you to these things? is not assurance of interest in covenant mercies worth labouring for? can you let these things lie without making your title clear? doth not the new creature breathe after it? doth not a rational soul desire it? do not all wicked men catch at a certainty, and frame to themselves some kind of certainty? do not worldlings take care to secure their money, goods, and estates? shall they re-

quire bonds, seals, oaths, and sureties, and yet account all this too little, and shall we account any thing too much to secure these precious mercies without which we are undone for ever? Oh let nothing hinder your endeavours this way; let no objections make you delay or be discouraged; let not Satan deter you, or the world's conceits make you slight it as unattainable, nor a slothful unbelieving heart obstruct your diligence in this great and weighty case. Who of you would live at such uncertainties as the most do? who would have his life to hang in doubt on a mere conjecture? especially when it depends on this important case of conscience, whether the soul must live in heaven or hell? but most of all, consider that our very lives are so uncertain that the next moment we may step into eternity. The God of heaven awake the saints of God who have indeed an interest in these mercies, to use all means to know they have an interest therein, that, as the apostle expresses himself, 1 John iii. 19, "they may know they are of the truth, and assure their hearts before him."

Thirdly,—In what cases may a believer make use of, or improve these sure mercies of David?

In answer to this, I shall propose these seven cases wherein a gracious soul may and must have recourse to these covenant mercies.

1. In case of unsettling suggestions leading to atheism or unbelief. When reason begins to dispute the being of God, or the truth of the Scriptures, and shakes our confidence, or strikes at the foundation, then study and improve these sure undoubted mercies, and lean upon divine authority; if God speak it, the thing is out of doubt, his *ipse dixit* is beyond all demonstrations. Divines make distinctions relative to maxims in divinity, some of which are *partly* divine, others are *solely*

divine. In truths of the former class, reason may be made subservient—first they are believed, then understood ;* as a man believes the immortality of the soul, then he begins to ascertain the same truth from reason, only reason must not here come before faith, but know her place ; for if she should offer to go before as an usher to make way for faith, we should never believe ; therefore Schoolmen say, “ Reasons going before faith weaken faith, but reasons coming after faith strengthen it :” † so that reason makes not the matter more sure *ex parte veritatis dictantis*, in respect of God the speaker, *sed ex parte intellectus dissentientis*, in respect of the weakness of our understanding. ‡ But now in things that are solely divine, and fall directly under faith, as the mystery of the Trinity, or of the incarnation, reason hath nothing to do but admire those hidden mysteries that she can never reach. O take heed of doubting or unbelief : gospel mysteries are without all controversy ; here your way is not to dispute but believe ; God’s word is more than all the protestations, asseverations, bonds or obligations of all the men in the world. Consider what is said in the doctrinal part, and give your full assent to all revealed truths. You may better believe God than your senses : senses may deceive us, God cannot. Many men are brutish and will believe nothing but what is within the reach of sense ; they are mere Sadducees about spirits and spiritual things ; but, sirs, will you believe nothing but what you see ? then surely you will not believe that there is such a city as Rome or Paris, because you have not seen them. But let me tell you,

* *Primo creduntur, et postea intelliguntur.*

† *Rationes præcedentes minuunt fidem, sed rationes subsequentes augent fidem.*

‡ See Weem’s Portrait of Imag. Ep. to Read.

that that tempting spirit who persuades you now to doubt of the being of God, and the reality of divine things, cannot doubt thereof himself; for he to his cost feels the truth, though without any comfortable interest therein; “the devils believe and tremble.”—James ii. 19. O therefore silence all unbelieving and disputing thoughts; doubt not after these clear revelations and demonstrations;* admit not this grand gospel sin of unbelief, this damning infidelity, but cry out as the poor man, “Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief.”—Mark ix. 24.

2. In case of guilt upon the conscience, and fears of acceptance, have recourse to these sure mercies of David. These are mercies, therefore mercy is working towards a poor sinner in misery; they are made sure by Christ to all heirs of promise, and though thou canst not sensibly apprehend him by faith at times, yet “whom he loves he loves to the end;” what though thy sins be many, yet mercy answers all demerits; it is not only mercy, but mercies, multitudes of tender mercies; he is plenteous in mercy, and will abundantly pardon; he doth not consult thy fitness, but his free grace: come then, poor guilty sinner, venture thy weary soul upon these sure mercies; he is meeting thee half way, as the prodigal’s father, and ready to all upon thy neck, his bowels are yearning towards thy distressed soul; he is very free and liberal in distributing, be not thou backward and shy in entertaining these sure mercies, he waits to be gracious, do thou bid his gracious tenders welcome. Yea, but saith the troubled self-condemned sinner, “though there be mercies, yet I question whether they belong to me; I know they are sure to some, but it is a great question whether I be of that number?” and I reply, why not

* Non est disputatio aut dubitatio post evangelium revelatum.

to thee? What Scripture reason leads thee to suspect that thou art excluded? The grant is in general terms; "Jesus Christ came to seek and save what was lost," and thou art lost, and feelest thyself to be lost—doth not he bid weary souls come to him? If thou wert righteous, thou mightest justly fear thou mightest go without him, but thou sayest thou art a sinner, and thou knowest, "he came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance;" thou art a sinner, suppose thou art a great sinner, even among the chief of sinners; and did not Paul look upon himself as such, and yet he obtained mercy? and consider if thou hast no interest in these mercies, whence then are all those fears, doubts, jealousies, complaints, and inquiries? Whence are these sad and dreadful apprehensions of thy sin and misery? these convictions of the nothingness of thy duties, and sufficiency of mercies only to relieve thy perishing soul? Whence are those meltings of heart for offended bowels of mercy? and strugglings against sin from the sense of mercy? What mean those prayers and tears, those tossings of thy soul betwixt hopes and fears about thy interest in mercy? and yet thou who thus complainest, wouldst not give up thy title, or quit thy claim to these covenant mercies, for a full possession of all the common mercies in the world. Thou art not content without these—thy inquiry is chiefly after these—thy expectation is most from, and dependance most upon, these covenant mercies;—these, and these alone are thy salvation and desire. But suppose the worst, that thou hast no interest as yet in these, why shouldst thou despair of future interest? shouldst thou not rather put it out of doubt by a present application of them by actual believing? Stand out, stand off no longer, take Christ upon his own terms, give up thyself to him, give him the glory of believing, remember

all the ways the Lord hath taken to assure thee of these mercies ; hence unbelief is the most unreasonable sin in the world *—this is the great damning sin ; say not with Cain, thy sins are greater than can be forgiven ; for is not the mercy of an infinite God beyond the demerits of a finite creature ? Nay further, thou givest God the lie who is truth itself ; he saith, “ there is life for dead condemned sinners in his Son ; ” † thou sayest, “ no, I have been to seek, and I want life, but there is none for me : ” yes, yes, soul, there is life enough for thee, grace abounds, and you may have life in abundance, only shut not out yourselves by unbelief, but come to him and he will in no wise cast you off, for he is ready to forgive your iniquities, and give you these sure mercies.

3. In case of persecutions, afflictions, and temptations from Satan, the world, or any other quarter, you may then improve these covenant mercies, and find abundance of sweetness, solace, and satisfaction therein.—Were it not for these, the soul of a child of God would sink under his pressures ; how often doth David profess that he would have perished in his affliction, had not God’s word of promise supported him ? ‡ A covenant word will lift up the soul from the lowest depth, a covenant God will encourage a saint in the greatest straits ; there is a divine art in a Christian’s improving this stock to the best advantage, and affliction is a proper season to make use thereof ; as supposing a man to be in poverty, there is enough in the covenant to make him rich ; if in disgrace, covenant mercies make him honourable ; if sick, one covenant mercy (even pardon of sin) will made him sound ; if in prison, covenant mercies set him at liberty ; if hungry or thirsty, why, covenant mercies are meat and drink to him ; if

* John iii. 19.

† 1 John v. 10, 11.

‡ Psalm cxix.

deprived of relations, still covenant mercies make up that loss, and give the soul to see better relations in heaven.* O Christians, your case can never be forlorn, as long as you have such rich mercies of the covenant to support and supply you, let all the men on earth set themselves against you, they can but storm the outworks, they can never surprise your citadel, or rob you of your best goods—these mercies of the covenant, which are made sure to you by a covenant of salt. O hold fast and embrace these mercies in such a time as this; when trade decays, your stock is safe; in a plundering time, none can divest you of your treasure and estate; you have something that all the devils in hell, and men on earth, cannot deprive you of; troubles will but drive these mercies into your breasts more firmly and feelingly, rather than keep them from you, or render you suspicious of your interest in them, for these are seasons wherein God communicates most of himself to the soul. Jacob's sad and solitary journey was attended with the choicest, heart-reviving discoveries; † heaven was opened and God shone upon blessed Stephen's soul through a shower of stones.‡ O Christians, it is worth a world to have interest in God in the day of affliction, and it is your great work in such a day to bear up your hearts with what you have in the covenant of grace: beware of discontented murmurings under any trials, since you have a God that can and will be all in all to your souls, in the want of all comforts and in overflowing of sorrows.

4. You may improve these covenant mercies in a day of spiritual dearth, in the famine of the word,

* Isa. xxxiii. 24. Dei hominem et cultorem Dei obnixum spei veritate et fidei stabilitate fundatum, mundi hujus et sæculi temptationibus commoveri, negat.—*Vide Cypr. Tractat. cont. Demetr. p. 273.*

† Gen. xxviii. 10.

‡ Acts vii. 56.

which is the saddest judgment, when means and ordinances fail, and the soul is in great danger of pining; then it is both safe and sweet to derive growth and strength from the spring head, even from God in a covenant way; these mercies nourish the languishing soul in a famishing season: Isa. xli. 17, 18, "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water." O blessed are the circumstances of believers, they have meat which others know not of, even hidden manna; God hath ways to convey marrow and fatness into their soul, when their ordinary provision is kept from them. I have read of a man, that was condemned to starve to death in prison; his daughter getting leave to visit him once a day, though not permitted to bring food, she notwithstanding preserved his life a long time by the milk which he sucked from her breasts. Oh how doth God preserve the souls of his children in prisons, by that good nourishment they derive from him in the breasts of the promises! he keeps them alive in famine; "bread shall be given them, their waters shall be sure;"* yea, he makes affliction and adversity both bread and water, therefore called in Scripture, "the bread of adversity and water of affliction,"† because souls are bravely nourished thereby: ordinances may for a season be removed, but influences of grace are still conveyed, grace is supported, and the soul supplied; as long as the spring remains free for a Christian's access he shall be provided for, though the channel be stopt, the streams cut off, and outward means much

* Isaiah xxxiii. 16.

† Isaiah xxx. 20.

obstructed: therefore, Christians, when the word of the Lord is precious, and there is little open vision, make your addresses immediately to God, see what he will speak to your souls; own him in covenant relation, lay your souls at his feet, and tell him that you are cast in a thirsty wilderness, your graces are withering, and hearts failing; tell him you can scarcely meet with an instrument to receive a word of counsel or comfort from, but ask him if he cannot supply without as well as by the means; tell him, he sometimes stops the conduit that he may convince us where our refreshment lies, and whither we must have recourse for fresh supplies; tell him when you enjoyed the means, they could not work without him, and now you want them he can work without them, though he hath restricted us to the means, yet he hath not restricted himself to them; tell him once again, that the more immediate his communications are, the more evidential they are, and the sweeter emblems of heaven.

5. Amidst your backslidings and fears of apostacy, then, O then improve these mercies of the new covenant; you fall and miscarry and lose your hold of God, but God hath hold of you; you dare not venture to approach him again, but he calls and tells you he will heal your backsliding, and will not cause his anger to fall upon you, because he is married to you, and he hates putting away. † The mercies of the covenant depend not on your mutable wills, but upon everlasting love—your souls are carried to heaven in the chariot of the covenant, which moves upon the solid axle-tree of free grace, which as it was not procured, so it is not continued by your merits or goodness. It is true, if you had carried the matter so towards men as you have done towards God, you might have expected a

* Jer. iii. 12, 14.

heavy sentence, but these are the sure mercies of an infinite God ; the covenant is made in Christ, and made good in Christ ; the Alpha and Omega, the Amen, the faithful and true witness is the surety and mediator of this blessed covenant. O Christians, place your confidence here ; there is help laid upon one that is mighty to save, he can save to the uttermost, he is good at this soul-saving work ; do not fear, he that hath begun this good work in your hearts will perfect it, you may be confident of it ; you shall be “ kept by the power of God through faith to salvation ; ” * though you be very weak, yet he is able to make you stand ; you shall not depart from him, omnipotence is engaged for you : † exercise faith, therefore, upon the numerous and gracious promises of perseverance ; though you have many “ fightings without and fears within,” though you feel averseness to good, and a tendency to sin, wants and weaknesses, burdens and breaches, snares and sadness, yet lift up your hearts, you stand upon better terms with God than Adam in innocency, or the angels in glory, who were not confirmed in their integrity, but are fallen by a dreadful apostacy. It were sad for poor believers, if their happiness did depend upon their mutable nature, or strongest resolutions ; or if God should revoke his mercies, as often as they provoke his justice ; but blessed be God for Jesus Christ, and the rest of the sure mercies of David. Triumph in this, O ye children of the promise, the covenant in which your souls are included, is ordered in all things and sure ; heaven itself is engaged for you, the gates of hell shall not prevail against you, none can pluck you out of his hands, who is the Rock of ages, in whom is everlasting strength ; you may confidently make bold and blessed Paul’s victorious

* 1 Pet. i. 5.

† Rom. xiv. 4. Jer. xxxii. 40.

challenge, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"—Rom. viii. 35—39. Though your internal movements be often like Ezekiel's wheel, * intricate, confused and perplexed, as a wheel in a wheel, grace swaying one way and flesh another, yet if you be joined to the living creatures, and united to Christ in the bond of the covenant, you shall go straight on with constancy and uniformity till your souls arrive at glory. These mercies are not for a day, or week, or month, or year, but they run parallel with the life of God and line of eternity, for "with everlasting mercies, he will have compassion on thee."—Isa. liv. 7, 8.

6. In case of desertions, and God's withdrawment from him, the believer may and must improve these sure mercies of David. Now desertions are ordinarily distinguished into God's withdrawing, first, his quickening, and secondly, his comforting presence from the soul; in both these cases, the soul may improve them.

(1.) In case God suspend the gracious influences of his Spirit, and the heart be shut up under deadness, hardness, unbelief, and distractions, and the poor Christian cannot feel the lively springings of covenant graces in his heart, then let him have recourse to the promise wherein God hath engaged himself to give a soft heart, a new spirit, faith, love, repentance, the spirit of prayer, &c.—all habits of grace, the lively exercise of grace, assisting grace, quickening, enlarging, moving, melting manifestations are bound up in the gospel covenant; hence it is, that when David finds his heart dull and out of frame, he runs to God and cries out, "My soul cleaveth to the dust, quicken me according to thy word."—Psalm cxix. 25, 107; and he goes often over with that phrase, which imports, that David lay under the sense of some promise, which

* Ezek. i. 16, 17, 21.

God had made for the quickening of his heart, when it was out of frame, and accordingly he recounts the gracious influences of God's Spirit, and professeth that he will never forget his precepts, because by them he had quickened him, verse 93. Thus, lay your dead hearts at Christ's feet, and plead in this manner: Lord, my heart is exceedingly dull and distracted; I feel not those enlarging, melting influences which thy saints have felt, but are they not chief material mercies of the covenant? dost thou not promise a Spirit of illumination, conviction, and humiliation? is not holiness of heart and life a main branch of it? dost thou not promise therein to write thy law in my heart? to give me oneness of heart, to put thy fear within me, to subdue my corruptions, to help my infirmities in prayer? now, Lord, these are the mercies my soul wants and waits for, fill my soul with these animating influences, revive thy work of grace in my soul, draw out my heart towards thee, increase my affection for thee, repair thine image, call forth grace into lively exercise: doth not that gracious word intend such a mercy when thou sayest, thou wilt not only give a new heart, but "put a new spirit within me,"* to make my soul lively, active, and spiritual in duties and exercises? dear Lord, am not I in covenant with thee? and are not these covenant mercies? why then, my God, is my heart thus hardened from my fear? why dost thou leave me in all this deadness and distraction? remember thy word unto thy servant in which thou hast caused me to hope, and which thou hast helped me to plead; O quicken my dull heart, according to thy word. Thus improve these mercies in case of deadness.

(2.) In case of sadness and disconsolateness, and the

* Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

hidings of God's face from a troubled, drooping spirit, O make, then, much use of these covenant mercies, both as they are mercies and as they are sure mercies, they are as free and as firm as ever ; if you see nothing but wickedness and wretchedness in yourselves, remember mercy prevents you ; if you see nothing but justice and frowns in God's face, remember his faithfulness engageth him ; he is faithful, he cannot deny himself—would he love you so as to make you his, and will he not now love you as his child ? Consider, the covenant is certain, though there be a present suspension ; your union to Christ is secured, though actual communion be intercepted ; yea, real, genuine communion is continued, though sensible manifestations be obscured ; for observe it, the soul holds communion with Christ by that which desertions cannot make void ; salvation may be there, though the joy of that salvation be gone, covenant relation may continue without comfortable satisfaction ; “ why hast thou forsaken me ? ” saith Christ and David his type, “ yet my God still.” * Christians, you are not to trust to present feelings ; David doth not say, make me to feel, but hear joy and gladness, † saith one, because sense or feeling is of no worth of itself, except first we hear it in a promise, that is a fancy which is felt and not heard from God, and we are to build upon a word of promise, even when we want the feeling of comfort ; it is not safe altogether to lean upon former experiences only, though these are good secondary helps, yet our primary and principle foundation is God in a promise, as our God in covenant. Let a dark and troubled spirit read, study, and practice that choice instruction, Isaiah l. 10, “ Trust in the name of the Lord,” there is enough in God's name to answer all doubts, read it, Exod. xxxiv. 5—7 ; mercy there an-

* Psalm xxii. 1.

† Psalm li. 8.

swers to our misery, grace to our unworthiness, long-suffering to our continued apostacy ; goodness answers our vileness, truth and faithfulness answer to our covenant breach and falsehood ; God keeps covenant, though we break it, yea, God keeps covenant with us though we are apt to think he breaks it. David thought God's mercy was clean gone, and that his promise failed for evermore, but he was convinced at last that that apprehension was his infirmity, Psalm lxxvii. 8—10. Therefore let a clouded Christian in his blackest desertions, lift up his eyes and heart to these sure mercies, and ponder thus : “ It is true my soul is dark, and God withdraws, it is a night of great affliction, but was it never day with thee, O my soul ? hath not the blessed day-star of grace risen in thy heart ? hath not God united thee to Jesus Christ ? did he never give thee the earnest of his Spirit ? didst thou never feel the stirrings of its graces, or the solace of its comforts ? Reflect upon thy former state, or rather study the freeness and fullness of gospel grace. What though I be without any sensible feelings of God's grace, or shinings of his countenance ? is not my life hid with Christ in God, even sometimes from mine own eyes as well as from others ? may not the sun be under a cloud ? shall I say my Father doth not love me, because he doth not always dandle me upon his knee, and evidence his love to me in sweet embraces ? I am resolved to cleave unto him though he kill me, and to believe in him though I cannot see him ; I will venture my weary soul upon his free grace in Christ ; the covenant is firm, its mercies are sure—there is hope in the God of Israel ; it may be he will cast a propitious look on a weary soul, how ever I am resolved to lie at his feet, and exercise affiance and dependence on his immutable promise, whe-

ther he ever shine upon my soul or not"—this will bring a good issue.

7. The last case wherein a Christian is to improve these sure mercies of David is in the hour and on the approach of death, when that grim serjeant looks upon us with his ghastly face, and arrests us with his cold hand, then mercy will stand us in stead, and sure mercies will be our sweetest cordial; these mercies remove the sting of death, perfume the grave, make way for the gracious soul to take its flight to glory, so that death is now become the Christian's friend and servant, rest and interest, conquest and crown. The apostle doth therefore reckon up death as one part of the saint's inventory, 1 Cor. iii. 21, 22, "All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours——." This is the fullest, longest, surest title; here is a sufficient enumeration, nothing can be wanting either in the mercies ensured, or manner of ensuring, or the duration; it is to all eternity, and it is the best and clearest tenure, *in capite*, in the head, Christ; it is both by purchase and by conquest, nothing is wanting to make these mercies sure for ever, for death which dissolves all other bonds of relation doth more firmly and closely unite God and genuine believers; it is as a porter to let them into their Father's house; a divine limbeck* to purify and prepare them for glory; and a voice which calls to the believer, saying, come up hither; in this life souls are but espoused to Christ, after death they are presented to him, and the marriage is consummated;† here we are absent from our husband, while present in the body, but it is more desirable to be absent from the body and present with the Lord, and

* Alembic or Still.

† 2 Cor. xi. 2.

this takes place on a dissolution of the earthly house of this tabernacle; so that hereby death becomes again, and brings believers to their proper home;* and why should we be afraid of a stingless serpent, or helpful servant, that doth us the greatest kindness? why are believers afraid to die? why do they not rather say as a good man did, [*egredere, anima, egredere*] go forth, my soul, go forth, and meet thy dearly beloved. But we need go no further to prove either the immortality of the soul, or the advantage of death, than the subject we are upon, even these sure mercies of David; for they continue to David even when he is laid in the grave, therefore our Saviour proves the resurrection from the covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, because it is a perpetual covenant, a covenant of salt;† and thus runs the argument: God is the God of the living and not of the dead, therefore these patriarchs are living and have an existence, because he hath made a covenant with them;‡ otherwise if these arise not, then must the covenant, of necessity, cease; but the covenant endures for ever, therefore those with whom he makes the covenant must live for ever, since God calls himself their God, even after they are laid in their graves;|| therefore, let Christians rest in hope, when they are laying down their heads in the grave, for the Scripture saith, “the righteous have hope in their death;” the covenant abides firm still—the mercies thereof die not when the body dies. The heathens themselves saw this. Socrates saith, “the swan was dedicated to Apollo, because she sung sweetly before her death;” and the Romans, when their great men died, and when their bodies were burnt to ashes, caused an eagle to fly and mount aloft, to signify that the soul was immortal.

* 2 Cor. v. 1, 2, 6, 8. Phil. i. 21.

† Numb. xviii. 19.

‡ Matt. xxii. 31, 32.

|| Exod. iii. 6.

And shall not the children of promise sing cheerfully when their souls are ready to mount up to eternal mansions? I confess I am really ashamed when I read Cicero, that any who call themselves Christians should dispute against the immortality of the soul, when he brings such arguments and authors to assert it; but I am much more ashamed that any real saints should shrink with fears of death, when even that poor heathen hath said so much to produce contempt of it.* Let Christians learn something from heathens. Many passages might be adduced for this purpose. I have subjoined a few; a world more of instances might be brought out of heathen authors to shame professed Christians, that have a higher sort of arguments against the fear of death, yet the sense of covenant relation is the strongest, and the sureness of covenant mercies is of singular use to mitigate those bitter pangs, when the king of terrors doth appear in the most formidable manner, and strikes his last stroke with the most terrible effect. Truly I may, with Mr. Dodd, call death the friend of grace, though it be the enemy of nature; our Saviour hath plucked out its sting and altered its very essence. I shall conclude

* *Cicero Tusc. Quæst. lib. 1, De Contemnenda Morte*: Maximum verò argumentum est, naturam ipsam de immortalitate animorum tacitam judicare, quod omnibus curæ sunt, et maxime quidem, quæ post mortem futura sint. Serit arbores quæ alteri sæculo prosint—quid procreatio liberorum, quid propagatio nominis, quid adoptiones filiorum, quid testamentorum diligentia, quid ipsa sepulchrorum monumenta, quid elogia significant, nisi nos futura significant, nisi nos futura etiam cogitare?—Nemo unquam sine magnâ spe immortalitatis se pro patriâ offeret ad mortem.—And against fear of death, he adds: Acherontia templa, alta Orci, pallida lethi, obtrubila, obsita tenebris loca, non pudet philosophum in eo gloriari, quod hæc non timeat.—Itaque non deterret sapientem mors, quæ propter incertos casus quôtidie imminet et propter brevitatem vitæ nunquam longè potest abesse.

this branch with a poem of divine Herbert's called Death. *

Death, thou wast once an uncouth, hideous thing,
 Nothing but bones,
 The sad effect of sadder groans,
 Thy mouth was open, but thou couldst not sing.

For we consider'd thee as at some six,
 Or ten years hence,
 After the loss of life and sense,
 Flesh being turn'd to dust, and bones to sticks :

We look'd on this side of thee shooting short,
 Where we did find
 The shells of fledg'd souls left behind,
 Dry dust, which sheds no tears, but may extort.

But since our Saviour's death did put some blood
 Into thy face,
 Thou art grown fair and full of grace,
 Much in request, much sought for as a good.

For we do now behold thee gay and glad,
 As at dooms-day ;
 When souls shall wear their new array,
 And all thy bones with beauty shall be clad.

Therefore we can go die as sleep, and trust
 Half that we have,
 Unto an honest, faithful grave,
 Making our pillows either down or dust.

Fourthly, An answer may be given to this question, How a believer, who is interested in these mercies, is to conduct himself? Though this be a necessary point, yet I must cut short on it, having insisted too long on the former particulars.

1. Believe and receive these mercies. " This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners."—1 Tim. i. 15. Is it the proposition only that is to be credited,

* The Church, page 180.

or embraced? Is it not Christ and the rest of the covenant mercies held forth in this precious maxim, which is the sweetest flower in the garden of Scripture, the choicest pearl in the word, and the most glorious star in the whole constellation of gospel promises? Who dares to doubt what God hath spoken? and who dares to refuse what God doth offer? He is so wise that he cannot be deceived, and he is so good that he will not deceive you; you may better believe God than your own sense;* give glory to him by embracing these mercies, deny or dispute no longer. Be not ungrateful for the grace of God, who has condescended so low as to give you evidence, on purpose that you may believe.

2. Improve these sure mercies, make use of them in all your particular necessities. If a man have a good spring he will make it serve for the convenient supply of many household wants, and convey it through several channels for a variety of uses; so a Christian must branch out the several mercies of the covenant to his diversified circumstances, as enlightening mercy for his darkness, enlivening mercy for his dullness, pardoning mercy in case of guiltiness, purifying mercy in case of strong corruptions—because God's grace is sufficient for us in all exigencies;† in all storms there is sea room enough in God's infinite mercy for faith's full sail; our God supplies all wants;‡ religion is a spiritual bond to unite God and the soul together, and a Christian in the exercise of his religion singles out that in God which is needful for him on all occasions. The life of faith is a retailing of divine benefits; as the co-

* De iis, quæ cognovit futuris et quæ adhuc sub visum non cadunt, tam certam habet persuasionem cognitione præditus, ut ea magis adesse putet, quam quæ sunt præsentia.—*Clem. Alex. Strom. lib. 7.*

† 2 Cor. xii. 9.

‡ Phil. iv. 19.

venant of grace gives a believer a title thereto, as it were, by wholesale. O let the heirs of promise improve these mercies.

3. Be content with these mercies. They are sufficient to make you happy ; seek not further to eke out your contentment in the creature, as though you had not enough in having these. What a strange expression is that of good Abraham, Gen. xv. 2, “ Lord God,” saith he, “ what wilt thou give me seeing I go childless ? ” Give him ! why had not God given him himself, and was not that an exceeding great reward ? verse 1 ; and could Abraham desire more ? O yes ; all this is nothing unless God give him a child—he takes no notice of this in comparison of a son. This is just our case. Let God give us himself and covenant mercies, we can overlook all these in our distempered fits, and look upon them as of no worth if he deny us some outward comfort that our hearts are set upon ; but this is our sin and shame—cannot God himself content us ? can we go from covenant mercies to mend ourselves with common mercies ? nay, do we not thereby weaken our interest, disparage our portion, and provoke God to withdraw his help from us ? Is not God a jealous God, and can he endure to have any rival in your affections.

4. Walk worthy of these sure mercies. O do not discredit them by your unsuitable carriage.* Live after the rate of heirs of promise ; walk exactly, spiritually, self-denyingly and soul-resignedly ; God hath given himself and these best blessings to you in mercy, O give yourselves and best services to God in a way of duty ! if you give yourselves to God as a whole burnt offering,

* Cum id præstiterit gratia ut moreremur peccato, quid aliud faciemus si vivemus in eo, nisi ut gratiæ simus ingrati.—*Aug. de Sp. et Lit. c. 6.*

it is but a reasonable service, for he hath given you more than you can give back to him ; * walk holily, steadily, cheerfully as becomes these mercies, do much for God who hath done so much for you ; let nothing discourage or disquiet your spirits, since you have mercies, sure mercies to lodge in your bosoms. Why should that soul be sad that enjoyeth an interest in the Father of consolations, the Purchaser of salvation, and comforting Spirit ? Sure mercies are calculated to create solid comfort and assurance for ever. O Christians, learn the lessons much inculcated, to walk worthy of your vocation and relation to God and his kingdom. †

5. Act as under obligation for these mercies. They cost Christ dear to purchase them, do not you think any thing too dear to do or endure for promoting or preserving of them ; kindness is very endearing to a grateful heart ; your pains cannot be spent to better purpose than in the cause of God ; we must always be paying our debt, though we can never fully pay it, we must be behindhand with God, but let a soul under the sense of mercies spend and be spent for God. You sow not in a barren soil ; as showers of mercy promise your fruitfulness, so an abundant crop of mercy will be your sure reward, and in your saddest seasons you shall have the richest harvest of mercy. If Christians knew what grapes of celestial Canaan they should taste in their wilderness sufferings for Christ, they would not be so afraid of them as they are. These mercies run most freely and sweetly when other streams run dry. Fear not sufferings, mercies will meet and support you.

6. Plead these mercies for your posterity ; though you should leave your children thousands a-year, yet, these covenant mercies will be the best portion ; you

* Rom. xii. 1. † Col. i. 10. Eph. iv. 1. 1 Thess. ii. 12.

cannot ensure your estates to your heirs, but these are sure mercies ; so that if you take hold of God's covenant, plead it, and live up to it, you shall have the benefit of these yourselves, and some, at least, of your children and successors shall enjoy the same mercies, for God will remember these unto a thousand generations : though he be not bound to every individual soul of your natural offspring, yet the Scripture fully shews that this is the surest way to obtain a portion for your children ; tell God they are more his than yours, you are but nurses for his children ; tell the Lord that you must die and leave them, but he lives for ever, and entreat him to be their loving, everlasting Father ; tell him that though you leave them something in the world, yet that is neither adequate nor durable ; but these sure mercies will not fail them—and comfort your hearts for your house and family with the last words of David, 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. O labour to transmit to future generations, your title to the favour of God, as the two tribes and a half did to future ages by their altar Ed.—Josh. xxii. 24, 28. *

7. Breathe after a full possession of these sure mercies, they are from everlasting to everlasting ; follow them to the spring in admiration and thankfulness, and follow this stream of covenant mercies to the ocean of eternity. Indeed, the streams are, in time, to the sons and daughters of men, but the origin is without a beginning in God's eternal thoughts of love, and the issue is without end in his everlasting embraces in heaven. O long to see the end : if these mercies be so sweet here, what will they be in heaven, in their proper element, as it were ! O that blessed state, that paradise of pleasure, that joy of our Lord, Abraham's bosom, a house not made with hands, a city with out foundations,

* See 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

a crown, a kingdom ! such things are the happy result of these sure mercies of David. Do these mercies bring forth such felicity ? O happy lot, that my soul hath an interest in these sure mercies ! but how long shall my soul be kept from the full possession of these mercies ? when shall I come and appear before God ? how long shall I sojourn in Meshech, and be detained from my Father's plenteous table above ? shall a captive long for his deliverance, and a young heir for his full inheritance ? and shall not my soul long to be with Christ above ? shall my body be so weary, and hath not my soul more cause to be weary of its burden and absence from home ? shall creatures groan, and shall not I, much more, to be delivered into the glorious liberty of the sons of God ? * shall the Spirit and the bride say come, and shall not my soul that hears these things, echo, come ? shall he say, himself, I come quickly, and shall I not answer, Amen, even so come Lord Jesus ? † Come, Lord, I long to see the end of these wonders of grace ; I much desire to enjoy those mercies which eye hath not seen, ear heard, or heart conceived, after another manner than here I am capable. Come, my God, I beseech thee shew me thy face ; and because none can see thy face and live, let me die that I may see thy face, and be swallowed up in the ocean of mercy, whither these covenant mercies flow. Dear Lord, either come down to me, or take me up to thee ; “ make haste my beloved, and be thou like a roe, or a young hart upon the mountains of spices. ‡

* Rom. viii. 19—23. † Rev. xxii. 17—20. ‡ Song viii. 14.

CHAP. XII.

THE SURE MERCIES OF DAVID ARE CALCULATED TO
ENCOURAGE BELIEVERS, AND TO EXCITE THEIR
GRATITUDE.

VII. FROM the subject which has been discussed, encouragement, comfort and refreshment may be derived. Here is an abundant spring opened to revive all the heirs of promise; but because I want room, and because much of that which hath been already delivered, tends this way, I shall rather improve it, to excite the people of God and heirs of promise to the great and delightful duty of thankfulness.

And here I might enlarge upon the nature, use, comfort and acceptance of the duty of praise in the account of God and men; but I must wave that, and only insist on some few particulars that concern the nature of these mercies, which may engage us to be thankful, which are these:

1. They are free mercies; they may be had without money or price, saith this prophet—free grace was the fountain, cause, and origin of these; he had mercy because he would have mercy; nothing moved his bowels of mercy on our part—free grace had no impulsive cause but itself. When you are to purchase these mercies, the price is fallen to just nothing—he gives liberally and upbraids not.* O what cause of thankfulness and admiration!

2. They are costly mercies. This doth not contra-

* *Quanti, O homines, profiteremini vos esse empturos, si salus æterna venderetur? ne si Pactolum quidem, qui totus aureo, ut est in fabulis fluit fluento, quis dederit, pro salute justum pretium numeraverit.*—*Clem. Alex. Adm. ad Gentes.*

dict the former—they are costly to Jesus Christ, but free to us ; they are purchased with the warmest blood in the veins of the Son of God ; yea, he thought his dearest heart blood well bestowed to purchase these sure mercies ; he sees of the travail of his soul and is well satisfied ; the fruits of his purchase are the joys of his heart ; he thinks these worth all his pains, pain and suffering ; God the Father is well pleased and accounts these mercies a valuable fruit of his son's purchase—and shall not we be thankful ?

3. They are extensive mercies, deep, high and broad, they have all the dimensions of greatness, Psalm xxxvi. 5, 6 ; these mercies can fetch up a drooping, despairing soul out of the grave, yea, out of hell—be the soul sunk as low as sin can depress it in this world, these mercies can recover it, and raise it out of the grave and pit of silence, and save to the uttermost.* O what a long arm of mercy hath been reached forth unto your troubled hearts in your low estate ! and doth not this deserve thankfulness ?

4. They are designed mercies, purposely designed, aimed and intended to set forth the riches of grace the infinite contrivance of the blessed God, to magnify the riches of his love to sinners. It is true, God intended to set off his power, wisdom, justice and truth, but he hath magnified his mercy above all the rest of his name ; it is beyond the greatest of his works, all the attributes of God are set very high, but mercy sits on the chief throne ; he declares to angels and saints what he can do for wretched man. O advance free grace.

5. They are dignifying mercies. Such honour have

* *Aquæ quo sunt profundiores, eo sunt puriores, quoniam et crassa et terrea materia in profundum depressa est—hinc profunditatem aquarum bibere. Ezek. xxxiv. 13.*

all his saints. O what a height doth God raise his covenant children to! he deals bountifully with them; by these covenant mercies was David raised up on high,* and therefore acknowledgeth, that God “regarded him according to the estate of a man of high degree,” 1 Chron. xvii. 17; and truly it is the highest preferment in the world to partake of these sure mercies; we have, therefore, great cause of thankfulness.

6. They are sanctifying mercies. They season all other mercies, and make common mercies to become covenant mercies; yea, they make crosses, mercies; they perfume the most distressing grief, and are like Moses’s tree that sweetened the waters of Marah. If you pour a pail of water on the floor, it seems a little sea, but pour it into the ocean it is swallowed up and seems nothing; so afflictions out of the covenant are intolerable, but as in covenant love they are inconsiderable, the depth of mercies drowns the depth of miseries—and is not this ground of thankfulness?

7. They are separating mercies. Hereby are God’s children distinguished from all the people that are upon the face of the earth, even in their finding grace in God’s sight, and having his presence with them, and making his goodness pass before them.* If there be any discriminating mercies for any of the children of men, as protection, provision, direction; these covenant mercies usher them in, and portion them out to the heirs of promise—and if you partake of them and find them to be good for you, then bless God.

8. They are sealing mercies; they signify, exhibit, and represent God’s love to the soul. Wherever these mercies are laid up in the breast of a sinner, he is the Jedidiah, or beloved of God—they testify such a person’s relation to God, and God’s affection for him;

* 2 Sam. xxiii. 1.

† Exod. xxxiii. 16—19.

wicked men are strangers to covenant love. God's people are the proper subjects of these endeared thoughts of his heart—and are you of that number? O give God the glory of this mercy.

9. They are comprehensive mercies—they are exceeding capacious, and embrace all the heirs of promise, not a gracious soul, though ever so poor, is left out, yea, they reach every Christian's state, case, exigency, and necessity. Let doubts be what they may, let fears, falls, faults be sad, and soul overwhelming, yet these sure mercies will answer all; they are commensurate and proportioned to all conditions of soul, body, estate, or relation. O bless God for them.

10. They are diversified mercies; they have respect to all the good that God promiseth, or a soul needeth, peace and pardon, grace and glory, holiness and happiness, all our fresh springs are herein, the good things of this life and of a better: many are the precious things put forth by the sun of righteousness in a covenant way. O what cause have we to bless God and admire free grace, that hath not only given us the spiritual good things of his kingdom—righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, but temporal good things by a sure and pleasing tenure; so that these sure mercies of the covenant ensure unto us the temporal things that are good for us; and also after another and better manner than any uncovenanted persons, though ever so great, can enjoy them; for, in a covenant way, believers do enjoy common mercies,

(1.) More refinedly, taken off the dregs of cares and sorrows, Prov. x. 22; a saint's bread, though never so coarse, is of the finest of the wheat, and he is satisfied with honey out of the rock; * yea, they come

(2.) More substantially: other comforts are but seeming comforts; as man walketh in a vain show, so what

* Psalm lxxxi. 16.

he enjoys is only a dream, but outward comforts coming through the blood of Christ are solid, substantial refreshments ;* again, they come

(3.) More agreeably : they have not those prickles and stings that worldly things have for natural men. O the peace and quietness that a Christian enjoys with outward comforts ; and further, temporal things come to a child of God,

(4.) More serviceably : the creature doth homage to its maker and master's children, so that what they have is for their good and doth them good ; and comforts also come,

(5.) More satisfyingly : a godly man is more contented with his little than the men of the world can be with abundance ; “ a little that the righteous hath, is better than the riches of many wicked,” Psalm xxxvii. 16 ; and then a child of God enjoys his comforts in a covenant way,

(6.) More safely : he needs not fear want, “ bread shall be given him, his waters shall be sure,” Isaiah xxxiii. 16 ; God is the Christian's purse-bearer, and it is in safer hands than in his own, and they are

(7.) More lasting : we shall have temporal mercies as long as we need them, and when we need them not, they shall be swallowed up in eternal enjoyments. O, therefore, let the saints of God be truly thankful—let the high praises of God be in their mouths ; this is the chief rent and reasonable tribute that God expects for these sure mercies ; sacrifice these sacrifices of thanksgiving, take this cup of salvation, and give God the praise that is due unto his name. Begin that work here in time, which shall be fully performed by the ransomed of the Lord to all eternity. This, this shall be the burden of the saint's triumphant song in the heavenly mansions ; that glorious palace shall ring and

* Luke viii. 18. Psalm xxxix. 6.

echo with the blessed exclamation, Mercy ! mercy endureth for ever ! free grace laid the foundation, and grace only will bring forth the top-stone of saints' glory. O how will God be admired by and in all, who believe at that day ! Well, sirs, begin those hosannas here, which will be seconded with hallelujah's hereafter ; speak well of your gracious God, admire his new covenant design, and let him have all the glory of this blessed contrivance—so shall you accomplish God's end, and evidence your covenant interest in these sure mercies of David.

Thus, though these divine graces which adorn the temple of a Christian's breast do sometimes disappear, and sin costs the soul some tears, yet the gracious soul hath abundant ground of thankfulness on the whole. Take it as expressed in divine Herbert's Poem on the Church Floor.

Mark you the floor ? that square and speckled stone,

Which looks so firm and strong, is—PATIENCE ;
And the other black and grave, wherewith each one

Is chequered all along—HUMILITY ;
The gentle rising, which, on either hand,

Leads to the choir above, is—CONFIDENCE.
But the sweet cement, which, in one sure band,

Ties the whole frame, is—LOVE and CHARITY.

Hither, sometimes, sin steals and stains

The marble's neat and curious veins ;

But all is cleansed when the marble weeps : .

Sometimes, death puffing at the door,

Blows all the dust about the floor ;

But while he thinks to spoil the room, he sweeps.

Blest be the Architect, whose art

Could build so strong in a weak heart.

END OF VOL. II.