

CLOSET PRAYER,

A

Christian Duty.

EPISTLE

TO THE READER,

Especially to the strict and serious Professor of Christianity.

CHRISTIAN FRIEND,

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

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

The consideration of these things hath engaged me to spend

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

† Acts Mon. 2 vol. lib. 8. fol. 122.

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

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

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

Whilst I am,

Oct. 31, 1668.

OLIVER HEYWOOD.

CLOSET PRAYER.

MATTH. VI. 6.

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

CHAP. I.

INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS.

SECTION I.

The Context examined.

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

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

Particularly, concerning the duty of prayer, there

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SECTION II.

The Words explained.

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

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

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

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

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

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

* Una specie simplicitatis pro toto genere positâ.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SECTION III.

Doctrines suggested.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* Isa. lxiv. 8.

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

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

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

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

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

That closet prayer is a christian duty.

Secret prayer is an evangelical exercise.

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

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

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

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

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

SECTION IV.

Several instances in Scripture of closet prayer.

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

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

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

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

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

† Gen. xv. 8—13. xvii. 3.

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

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

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

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

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

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

* Gen. xlviii. 16.

† Exodus xxiv. 12.

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

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

* Psalm cvi. 23.

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

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

7. JEREMIAH is a remarkable instance: he was a

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

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

* Jeremiah, ix. 1, 2.

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

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

* Psalm lv. 17.

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAP. II.

REASONS TO PROVE THAT CLOSET PRAYER IS A CHRISTIAN DUTY.

SECTION I.

Privacy convenient for prayer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SECTION II.

Relation between God and a genuine Christian.

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

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

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

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

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

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

* Gen. xlv. 1—4.

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

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

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

† 1 Sam. xx. 40, 41.

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

SECTION III.

God's omniscience and omnipresence.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* Rom. viii. 17.

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

* Psalm xxxiv. 15, 17, 18.

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

SECTION IV.

The Liberality of God.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* Gen. xxx. 8.

† Isa. xxv. 9.

‡ Isa. xxvi. 20.

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

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

† Prov. xviii. 10.

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

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

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

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

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

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

* See Mr. Cotton in loc.

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

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

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

† Ibid. fol. 318.

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

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

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

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

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

CHAP. III.

COMPRISING INFORMATION.

SECTION I.

Concerning Places of Prayer.

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

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

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

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

† *Eccles. Polit. lib. 5, c. 16.*

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

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

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

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

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

SECTION II.

On the Nature of Prayer.

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

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

* 1 Cor. x. 16, 17.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SECTION III.

On the Efficacy of Prayer.

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

* 1 Kings, xviii. 36.

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

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

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

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

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

SECTION IV.

A Love of Retirement characteristic of a true Christian.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* Psalm. lxxvii. 6.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAP. IV. .

CASES WHICH MERIT REPREHENSION.

SECTION I.

Wicked men reproved.

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

* Vide Pareum in loc.

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

* Jer. xvii. 1.

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

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

SECTION II.

Professors of religion reproved.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* Psalm xxxii. 6.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAP. V.

INSTRUCTIONS RELATIVE TO THE DEVOTIONS OF THE CLOSET.

SECTION I.

On Preparation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

† Cave, spectat Cato.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* *Vis unita fortior.*

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

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

SECTION II.

Directions respecting what is essential to Secret Prayer.

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

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

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

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

* Mark xii. 30, 33. † Matt. xv. 8, 9. ‡ Jer. xxx. 21.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

§ See *Mark xii. 36. and xiii. 11.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SECTION III.

The Circumstances of Secret Prayer.

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

Place, posture, season, and voice.

I shall but briefly advert to these.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* Mr. Clark in his Life.

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

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

SECTION IV.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* Tolle invidiam, mea tua sunt et tua mea.

CHAP. VI.

ON THE MATTER OR WORDS OF PRAYER.

SECTION I.

The Lord's Prayer.

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

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

† Practical Catech. pag. 277.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SECTION II.

Jacob, an example of powerful pleading with God.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* Mic. vii. 20.

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

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

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

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

CHAP. VII.

FORMING A CONCLUSION TO THE SUBJECT OF CLOSET PRAYER.

SECTION I.

The Exhortation of the Text enforced.

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

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

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

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

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

* Ille dolet verè qui sine teste dolet.

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

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

* Rom. ii. 23.

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

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

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

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

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

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

* 2 Kings xvii. 9.

† Psalm xc. 8.

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

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

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

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

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

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

SECTION II.

Several Objections Considered and Answered.

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

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

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

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

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

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

* Nobis pietate peculia crescunt.—*Mant.*

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

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

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

* Eph. vi. 6, 7.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SECTION III.

Some Cases of Conscience, examined and solved.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ans. Such a case is sad : yet consider,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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