

JOB'S APPEAL;

BEING

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JOB'S APPEAL.

JOB X. 7.

*Thou knowest that I am not wicked, and there is none that
can deliver out of thine hand.*

THIS text contains the sum of the grand controversy between afflicted Job and his censuring friends, who would prove Job to be a wicked man. The devil and Job's friends speak the same language; only Satan presumes upon it, that if God will touch Job's flesh he will curse him to his face. His friends uncharitably accuse him as one that *had* cursed God, or committed some scandalous sin, and therefore God did so severely touch his flesh. Against this charge Job makes his appeal to the heart-searching God, and saith, "thou knowest that I am not wicked."

The latter part of the text implies, first, A concession. I may notwithstanding all my integrity be in God's hand, that is, in the correcting hand of God : and secondly, contains an assertion, "none can deliver out of thine hand;" as if he had said, I may continue long under it, and no power in heaven or earth can rescue me, except God himself set me at liberty. A word may be introduced relative to the former, though the latter be the subject assigned me. "Thou knowest:" the words are very emphatical, and signify, it is in thy knowledge that I am not wicked; as if he had said, thou hast not this knowledge from without, from reports or hearsay; no,

thy knowledge is from thyself; it is internal, immediate, and therefore perfect and infallible.

God exactly knows every man's state and frame; his knowledge is not consequent but concomitant; "all things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do;" God's line soundeth man's depth; our persons and actions are manifest to him now, and shall be laid open before angels and men in the great day.

"Thou knowest that I am not wicked:" he saith not, that I am not a sinner: alas, there is too much sin in me. "Sin," (saith an interpreter,) "remains in the regenerate, yet they cannot, or ought not to be called wicked; God gives the denomination from the better part. The best saints are indeed sinners, yet the worst saints are not wicked; they are sinners by remaining corruption, but are godly by renovation." The word here, corresponds with that in Psal. xviii. 21, where David says, "I have not wickedly departed from my God," that is, by a course of sinning. The phrase also imports being condemned and cast at God's bar, as a wicked man, Ps. cix. 7, "When he is judged let him be condemned;" let him go forth as a condemned malefactor; I dare appeal to the all-wise, heart-searching God, that I am not such a one.

Doct. That a truly gracious soul dare appeal to God that he is not wicked.

The child of God makes him witness of his integrity: at the time when enemies scorn, Satan accuseth, conscience upbraids, and God keeps at a distance, the devout soul can say, "Behold my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high."

It may seem a paradox, but is a great truth, that the holiest saint on earth dares not justify himself before God, yet he dare stand before God to justify his

integrity. This must be understood in an evangelical and not in a legal sense; through Christ the mediator, and not as in the believer; according to the covenant of grace, and not that of works. A great divine saith, "the gospel covenant laxeth the rigour of the law, which calleth for complete obedience, by resolving all into sincerity and truth. When we go upon the trial for our life before Christ's bar, the great inquest will be whether we have been sincere or not;" he does not mean that sincerity is set up in Christ's room, but as it is an evidence of our interest in him: hence Job saith, chap. xxxi. 6, "Let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know my integrity." He means a gospel balance, for "by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." He does not mean that God must weigh him before he can know him, but he speaks after the manner of men. Thus David also, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me," Psal. cxxxix. 23, 24. There is too much wickedness in my depraved heart God knows, but I dare appeal to thee, that there is no way of wickedness, no ordinary road, nor any uninterrupted path of sin in me. Sin doth not make a thoroughfare in my soul, I give it many a turn, and dare appeal to thee that I would gladly be rid of it.

All I shall do on this point, is to propose and answer this weighty case of conscience:—How may a Christian make it out in his appeal to God that he is not wicked? I confess this is a great question, and hard to be resolved, but I shall follow the scripture line, in representing the pious soul's appeal to God.

1. Lord thou knowest that I am not as I have been, that there is a great change wrought in my heart and life. A turn I have had—thou knowest whether it be

saving or not, whether it be from the power of Satan unto God; but this I can say, such a one I was, but am not, I am put into a new frame, and thou knowest whether I am made a new creature or not; the stream of my affections runs in another channel, thou knowest whether it be the channel of grace and heaven-wards.

2. Thou knowest I have made a solemn covenant with thyself; thou knowest the time, place, manner, inducements, ends, and witness thereof. I studied the nature of this covenant, and felt the pulse of my soul, whether I was cordial in it or not, and thought I chose thee as my chief good and utmost end, and gave up myself entirely to thee, when there was no witness besides thee and my own conscience. Thou knowest whether I had any reserves or evasions, in this solemn transaction. I have given thee the keys of my heart, and am glad of such a guest and Lord.

3. Lord, thou knowest I do not regard iniquity in my heart, and cannot look pleasantly upon it. There is in me a secret dislike of every sin, not only as soul-damning, but as God-dishonouring. I hate every false way as contrary to the law of God; yea, methinks I find an antipathy to it as contrary to my new nature; for though suited to my carnal palate, yet grace raiseth my heart against it, for the intrinsic evil in it as well as the consequences of it; I hate it though delectable and profitable, yea, I abhor what is evil, even the garment spotted by the flesh.

4. Lord, thou knowest I do daily resolve and pray against sin, all sin of heart and life; thyself art privy to my earnest supplications that I may not be led into temptation, nor left under the power of it. Lord, do thou set a watch before my mouth; let not my heart incline to any evil thing; God forbid I should do this wickedness and sin against him; I am purposed that

my mouth, hand, or foot shall not transgress. God hath heard my prayers, and known my vows against particular lusts to which I have been addicted, and I hope I can say as David: "I was also upright before him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity;" so that it prevails not over me.

5. Lord, thou knowest I am daily seeking not only to lop off the branches, but to stub up the roots of sin, to weaken and mortify the body of death, and to crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts. It is not enough to cease from the acts, but my soul would enfeeble the habits of sin. O that the old man were crucified with Christ, that the body of sin may be destroyed! The sure conquest is only obtained through Christ's death and resurrection, and I find it is nothing but the law of life in Christ Jesus that makes me free from the law of sin and death: he only came to destroy the works of the devil.

6. Lord, thou knowest I set myself against secret and spiritual sins; "cleanse thou me from secret faults." I am afraid of pride, hard-heartedness, hypocrisy, vanity, formality, and all spiritual as well as fleshly wickedness. Now I understand by thy holy law that the least motions of sin in my heart are evil and deserve death. Thou knowest whether I make not conscience of suppressing those sins which others make no reckoning of, even vain thoughts and risings of depravity.

7. Lord, thou knowest the conflicts and combats betwixt flesh and spirit; the flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh: methinks I find within me as it were the company of two armies; my corruption is not on the throne but in the field; sin hath not dominion over me, for I am daily warring, and though I am oft foiled by it, yet fall on again. Sin is not a king but a tyrant in me; I go daily armed

into the field and must fight under the banner of my dear Lord, and shall be a conqueror.

8. Lord, thou knowest these sins break my heart as they break out within me; they lie as a heavy load on my conscience, and make me weary and heavy laden. How oft do I cry, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?" Thou knowest the tears and groans my sin hath cost me. "Lord, all my desire is before thee, and my groaning is not hid from thee." One sin hath cost me more than all my other troubles; Oh my broken bones!

9. Lord, thou knowest that I love not the company of wicked men, I bid them oft depart from me, not from ostentation, but for fear of infection; for I would not be found with the wicked when my Lord calls: "I have not sat with vain persons; I have hated the congregation of evil doers." I have often experienced either grief or guilt in a needless association with wicked men, and I hope thou wilt not rank me with the wicked whom I love not.

10. Lord, thou knowest I love the society of thy saints and servants; I am a companion of all them that fear thee, I account them the excellent of the earth, in whom is all my delight. I am sure wicked men love not thy children, and those are passed from death unto life that love the brethren. I love them because they are like thee my heavenly Father, and bear thine image though they be poor in the world, and may differ from me in some things, yet my heart is towards them, and I take a pleasure in having communion with them in God's worship and Christian converse.

11. Lord, I love to be admonished of my faults, and love them better that are faithful to reprove me for my sins; I can truly say, I love my minister better for his plain dealing, and the word of God for its purity:

“Lord make me to know my transgressions and my sins.” I love not palliating, but would have my wound searched to the bottom that it may be safely cured. “If the righteous smite me it shall be a kindness;” yea, even Ishmael’s railing shall do me good, by a solemn reflecting on my faults.

12. Lord, thou knowest whether my soul doth not love thee and thy Son Jesus Christ. Thou hast said that to them that believe he is precious. I have often been feeling the pulse of my soul, and dare appeal to thee with Peter, “Lord thou knowest that I love thee:” thyself shalt vouch for me and make the affidavit: thou shalt not have this attestation at my hand, but upon thine own knowledge. Thou art the chief among ten thousand; yea doubtless, I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ.

13. Lord, thou knowest what a poor sorry thing I account the world to be and all its glory; I esteem the pleasures, profits and honours of the world as a pageantry. I have made Moses’s choice, to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than choose the pleasures of sin, the honours and offices of Pharaoh’s court. I can look through the best of the world and turn my back upon it, as an empty, insignificant thing, though the men of the world are content with it for their portion.

14. Lord, thou knowest the way that I take, and the earnest desire and design of my soul to walk in thy ways, to have respect to all thy commandments, and to attend on all thine ordinances. I miss it in all but dare balk none; my aim is, to fulfil all God’s will, to stand complete in all the will of God. There is no flesh-displeasing duty, no self-denying act but I attempt it. If God say, do it; I will not consult flesh and blood, but my language is, as thou hast said so must I do; my

foot standeth in an even place, and lies square to God's will, at all times, in all places and conditions.

15. Lord, thou knowest I do my best in every religious exercise: God forbid, I should offer to the Lord that which costs me nothing. I must love the Lord with all my soul, mind, and strength: and God forbid that I should do his work negligently, or offer to him a corrupt thing. O that I could be more fervent in spirit in serving the Lord. God deserves more, and my best is infinitely below him. O that I could do more! but, alas! I am short in all.

16. Lord, thou knowest my design in all I do is for thy glory and the enjoyment of thee. I dare not look both at thee and myself; then I lose myself in my natural, civil, and spiritual acts; all the lines must and shall bend this way, that "God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ." My design is to live to the Lord, and to die to the Lord, that Christ may be magnified in my body, by life or death. O that I could enjoy communion with thee in every duty and ordinance! thou knowest this is my heaven.

17. Lord, thou knowest all my dependance is upon thy Majesty, both for assistance and acceptance: I must lean on my beloved, and by the grace of God I am what I am. I cannot think a good thought without fresh supplies of grace; but I am able to do all things through the strength of Christ, and can run in the way of God's commandments when he enlarges my heart. I lay all upon thy golden altar to be accepted in the Beloved.

18. Lord, thou knowest I am daily pressing towards perfection, for I have not yet attained what I would gladly reach: I would be mending what is amiss, and be soaring to a higher-pitch of grace, perfecting holi-

noss in the fear of God ; increasing with all the increase of God till I come to a perfect man. Alas, how much do I yet want of perfection ! I would still be singing the song of degrees, and going from strength to strength till I appear before God in Zion.

19. Lord, thou knowest how much I am concerned for thy church, which gives me some ground to hope I am a lively member in that mystical body : “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.” It raiseth my heart to see the gospel propagated, sinners converted, saints edified, and united : and it runs to my heart to see Christ’s interest laid low, the preaching of the gospel obstructed, few converts, scandals breaking out, and contentions breaking in : then I say, “Woe is me ! the good man is perished out of the earth.” When wickedness abounds, and love decays,* I make that lamentation, Isa. lix. 11—15.

20. Lord, thou knowest notwithstanding all this, what a mean opinion I have of myself and my poor doings :† alas, my doings are but dregs and rags ! I am still an unprofitable servant, I despair of myself and abhor myself in dust and ashes : I am vile in mine own eyes. God may justly condemn me notwithstanding all I have done, yea, and for all I have done, for if the Lord mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand ? I fly to my advocate Jesus Christ, and desire the New Testament Aaron to take away the iniquity of my holy things.

I shall subjoin a few words of *application*.—1. For instruction. If God’s children thus appeal, then,

(1.) Others do not know their hearts, for God’s children do not appeal to men but God. No man knows another’s heart, and should not pretend to it. Dost thou say : “it is a wild, groundless censure, from such as

* Terras Astrea reliquit. † Horreo quicquid de meo est.

carry fair, but whose hearts are bad?" How knowest thou? Dost thou usurp God's throne? The best men have been deceived with the professions of others; as the church on earth with Simon Magus, Acts viii. 13, 23.* The church judgeth of overt acts, not secret thoughts.

(2.) The most observant persons have much ado to know their own hearts, and are glad to appeal to God. The prophet saith, who knows it? It is a deep fathomless pit. Hazael said, "Is thy servant a dog, that I should do such a thing?" Peter was confident he should never deny his Master, but both failed. The inward thought of every one is deep, and the heart gives deceitful answers like the heathen oracles. He that trusteth to his own heart is a fool, for it will certainly deceive him.

(3.) Yet it is possible men may know their spiritual state God-wards, or else Job would not have appealed to God. The expression speaks some confidence:† Job doth not doubt, but assert his integrity; yea he saith "My righteousness I hold fast and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me as long as I live," Job xxvii. 6. It is possible men may know whether they be in a state of grace or not, for God hath given conscience for this end. "The spirit of a man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly," Prov. xx. 27. If men were faithful and would light their candle at the word of God and make diligent search they might know more.

(4.) The whole world is distributed into two sorts of persons, the godly and the wicked. "Two loves," saith St. Augustine, "built two cities; the love of God built mount Zion, and worldly love built Babylon: and

* De secretis non judicat Ecclesia.

† Vox non dubitantis sed asserentis.

the whole race of mankind are inhabitants of these two cities." Though carnal men do not believe this, and think men differ only partially and not specifically, some worse and others better, not in kind; yet a time is coming, "when men shall discern betwixt the righteous and the wicked, betwixt him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not: for the sheep shall be set on the right hand, and the goats on the left, and receive their different sentences from the impartial judge of the world. At this day discriminating grace makes a difference, and discriminating preaching shows a difference among men: for ministers must teach the people the difference betwixt the holy and profane, and divide the word of God aright, for it is a discerners of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Men may see a vast difference, if they are not wilfully or judicially blind.

2. Another use is, of admonition,

(1.) To all sorts of persons, to be and behave themselves as those who may make their appeal to God. Oh that all Christians could say as the church of old: "all this is come upon us, yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant.— Shall not God search this out, for he knoweth the secrets of the heart?" Psal. xlv. 17 and 21. O friends, on what side are you? God knows, and it is fit you should know. "I know my sheep, and am known of mine." "He needed not that any should testify of men; for he knew what was in man," John x. 14, and ii. 25. Look to it, if you be of a holy and pious character, God will own you as his: if not, be sure your sin will find you out. Ask yourselves, what am I? a sheep or a goat? Whose am I? God's servant or the devil's slave? What am I doing? God's work or the devil's drudgery? Whither am I going, to heaven or hell? What say you to the various appeals we have

mentioned? Will your hearts ingenuously echo to them? If you say yes; compare your hearts with scripture and go on safe grounds: if not, tremble under the sentence of condemnation. Be strict in this case, for you must be tried another day.

(2.) If you find you are wicked, then woe to you, whether you be openly profane or secret hypocrites: "The light of the wicked shall be put out: a hypocrite shall not come before God: the ungodly shall not stand in judgment, for the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish. The wicked must be silent in darkness and turned into hell. He will rain upon them snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest." Upon your doors you may have written, Lord, have mercy upon us, but God will not own you nor hear your prayer, but say to the wicked: "What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant into thy mouth?" Psal. l. 16. All you do is sinful, whether called natural, civil, or religious acts. The very ploughing of the wicked is sin; their sacrifice or prayer is an abomination to the Lord. It will be bitterness to them in the end. "Say ye to the wicked, it shall be ill with him." The longer you live, the more mischief you do and the more misery you heap up to fit you for destruction. Therefore bethink yourselves, repent, and forsake your ways and thoughts, that God may have mercy on you.

3. A further use concerns God's children especially by way of comfort. You that dare and do thus appeal to God in sincerity, whose hearts do not upbraid you, thank God for it: this very appeal is a good evidence of your sincerity, and will fortify you against the censures of men. God knows you better than men, and will clear you when men condemn you. How often doth David

cheer up himself with this? Your names may be under a cloud for a season, but "God will bring forth your righteousness as the light," Psal. xxxvii. 6. Thus he did with holy Job. It will fortify you against Satan's sore temptations. When he accuseth you to God you may say, "the Lord rebuke thee, O Satan." When he accuseth you to yourselves, and conscience condemns, God is greater than your hearts and will supersede all pleas. In the hour of sad desertion, when God hides his face or withdraws his grace, this will cheer you, that you can go to God and say, I am not wicked. Let God carry himself as he pleaseth to me, his favours are his own, he doeth me no wrong, I will cling to him still: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." If he carry himself strangely towards me, yet he is good and worthy to be followed in the dark, and I will stay myself on him. In a dying hour it will be a blessed reflection, to say, with good Hezekiah under sentence of death: "Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight," Isa. xxxviii. 3. Happy soul! that can look death in the face, and with confidence approach the tremendous tribunal under the comfortable sense of this upright and scriptural appeal.

Yet take a caution or two.

(1.) Beware of ostentation. Pride not yourselves in your integrity, for this is contrary to the nature and ends of this appeal. "If I justify myself my own mouth shall condemn me." Alas! I am far from perfection: "I am vile what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth, and repent in dust and ashes."

(2.) The Lord Jesus is to be our surety and answer for us. "Where is boasting? It is excluded. By

what law? of works? nay, but by the law of faith." Rom. iii. 27. The language of the gospel is, "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory," Isa. xlv. 25.

Thus I have dispatched the former part of my text; I proceed to the latter—"There is none that can deliver out of thine hand." What, none? then our condition is as bad as fallen angels'. But none, here, must refer to mere creatures, for Jesus Christ can deliver out of the hands of justice, from present wrath, and from wrath to come. The hand of God, denotes the power of God. Deliverance is either temporal, spiritual, or eternal, and which way soever it may be taken it affords this *doctrine*:—That no means on earth can rescue a person out of the hands of the infinite God. In opening this doctrine, I shall,

First, show the meaning of the words. Interpreters take them in a twofold sense, some as (*vox dolentis*) the language of Job's sorrow, moving God's bowels of compassion, as if Job should say, why Lord dost thou deal thus severely with me? Who can rescue me when thou dost arrest? Thou mayest keep me under restraint for ever, and take time enough to punish me, thou needest not put me upon such a painful rack as though I were in danger to be rescued or escape thy hands; as princes fearing the rescue of a prisoner, send forth a writ of execution to dispatch him. The tormented prisoner that desired a dispatch from his misery by death was answered by the tyrant,* I am not so far friends with thee. It may be this text is parallel to chapter vii. where Job would be glad to be quit of his pain; but, saith he, I cannot till God's time; yet Lord, pity me, smite me not both sharply and long.

Some make it sound as (*vox profitentis*) Job's heroic

* Nondum tecum in gratiam redeo.

and magnanimous profession and stout resolution to adhere to God and duty, though he were kept under God's hand all his days! as if he had said, I have appealed to thee that I am not wicked, and I hope hitherto my integrity hath appeared, and, by thy grace assisting me, shall further appear, though none should deliver me out of thy hand: I humbly hope thou wilt find me holding mine integrity as long as life: do what thou wilt with me I will honour thee. I hope to prove the devil a liar, who said, I would curse thee to thy face: hitherto he has been mistaken, and I hope will be by the grace of God assisting me. If I never be delivered, God shall not be blasphemed; I will for ever have good thoughts of him, whatever he may do with me; if I cannot be delivered, or satisfied about God's proceedings, yet God shall be justified. Both these senses are proper enough, and we may take it either way.

Secondly, what is it to be in God's hand? God's hand in scripture implies several things.

1. His eternal purpose and design, Acts iv. 28, "For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done." This cannot be altered, for the counsel of the Lord shall stand for ever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations. This is a truth, but not pertinent here.

2. God's supreme, actual power extended and put forth to do good, expressed by putting forth his hand to heal. When God will help and heal, the devil cannot pluck the patient out of God's hand. But neither is this the proper sense here.

3. By God's hand is meant his provision for his creatures, Psal. civ. 28, "Thou openest thy hand, and they are filled with good." Indeed none can starve those that God will supply; in the days of famine they

shall be satisfied. Yet this is not the meaning of the text.

4. God's disposing and ordering providence is expressed by his hand, Psal. xxxi. 15, "My times are in thy hand." No one can lengthen or shorten my days but thyself: man's days are appointed, and God appoints their bounds. I think Job does not mean this directly here.

5. By God's hand is meant sometimes, divine assistance, Psal. lxxiv. 11, "Why withdrawest thou thy hand, even thy right hand?" this means protection or help. And again, "Let thy hand be with the man of thy right hand." Indeed none can hinder or weaken if God strengthens. Yet this is not the sense.

6. By hand, is meant God's special love and favour. Luke i. 66, "The hand of the Lord was with him." Meaning some peculiar indulgence and visible token of God's respect for him. This is a mercy that none can deprive saints of. Yet this is not meant.

7. The operation of the Holy Spirit. Ezek. i. 3, "The hand of the Lord was there upon him." Whether this means the extraordinary or ordinary motions of the Holy Spirit, there is none that can hinder or obstruct them. This is a truth, but not the truth in the passage before us.

8. By God's hand is meant, any providential dispensation whether good or bad. "Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and not evil," Job ii. 10. This is God's prerogative only; he kills and makes alive. This idea may be included in the text, but this is not all.

9. Yet more particularly, by the hand of God is meant, the hand of affliction. Thus David saith, "Thy hand presseth me sore," Psal. xxxviii. 2. Whether inward or outward affliction be supposed; as when

Job saith, "Have pity upon me, O ye my friends, for the hand of God hath touched me."

10. By the hand of God, is meant death. To God belong the issues from death. If he kill, who is he that can preserve alive, or raise from the grave? "I kill, and I make alive, I wound, and I heal, neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand." This last meaning, and that concerning affliction, I take to be what is meant by the hand of God in my text. Where are the men or things that can secure us from death or trouble? What power or policy can prevent or remove by force or cunning, the hand of God when he thinks good to lay it upon us? Suppose God take away estate, friends, relations, health, peace, liberty, or life, who can forbid him? If God stops the breath, who can hold it? The whole world must yield before him.

Thirdly, Who, or what in men's opinion, is judged most likely to deliver persons out of the hand of God?

1. Men expect that their riches, and honours, or great friends should deliver them; like that wretched prelate who cried out when dying, "Will money do nothing? Will my prince's favour avail nothing? Must I die, who can command the greatest part of the kingdom?" No, no, riches profit nothing in the day of wrath. "None can by any means redeem his brother, or give a ransom for him." Men are mistaken if they think to purchase a reprieve or exemption from death, or any other trouble. Here money bears no mastery; a golden key will not open God's prison door, and no bribe can be admitted in this case to preserve us from the stroke of justice. Alas! if God take men away with his stroke, then a great ransom cannot deliver them. God will not esteem men's riches.

2. Some have great confidence in an arm of flesh;

they think natural health, vigour, or fortitude will stand them in stead: but, alas, what becomes of the most vigorous spirits and constitutions? Where is Xerxes' army of a million men with all their fortitude and magnanimity? "No man hath power over the spirit, to retain it; there is no discharge in that war," Eccl. viii. 8. Forces of strength cannot withstand assaults from heaven, any more than men can prevent drops of rain from falling. Where is the doughty champion that can meet in arms with Jehovah? Who hath hardened himself against God and prospered? Are men, yea all men, stronger than God? "When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?" And on the contrary, he will recompense whether men choose or refuse: "There is none that can deliver out of my hand," saith God, "I will work, and who shall let it." All attempts are vain to prevent an evil, be it public or personal, whether it relate to soul or body.

3. Men make great reckoning of wit, parts, learning, or politic stratagems. Men dig deep to hide their counsels from the Lord, but "God disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise." The most learned physicians cannot find out an antidote against the approach of sickness or death. If men say, we will do thus, yet if God say, it shall not stand, it tumbles down as a Babel of men's inventions: he saith, take counsel together, but it shall come to nought. A whole college of physicians with all their art and learning cannot cure so much as a rheumatic pain, yea the most contemptible disease shall be a door to let in death, if God opens it, for he alone keeps the key. With small circumstances the great God can, and often does, confound the heads of the wisest politicians, and make their counsels of none effect; "For there is no wisdom, nor understand-

ing, nor counsel against the Lord." Cæsar Borgias little thought of his own sickness and death, when he laid the design of managing all things to his own advantage after his father's death. "Man knoweth not that which shall be."

4. There is one thing which is most likely to deliver out of the hand of God, that is, true religion. "Righteousness delivereth from death," in two respects:—by the prayers and piety of others; "He shall deliver the island of the innocent, and it is delivered by the pureness of thy hands," Job xxii. 30. The poor wise man by his wisdom delivered the city. God would have spared Sodom for ten righteous persons in it: and he saith of Jerusalem, "Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth: and I will pardon it," Jer. v. 1. Moses prevailed for all Israel consisting of an army of six hundred thousand men. Surely then such interposition will deliver out of the hand of God; no, sometimes it will not: "though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be towards this people; cast them out of my sight," Jer. xv. 1. "Yea though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it; they should but deliver their own souls by their righteousness." If all the holy men on earth should interpose for one man, they could not deliver him in some cases. A man's personal holiness, piety, and prayers cannot deliver him out of God's hands, especially in case of temporal calamities; neither Moses nor Aaron could prevail to go into Canaan. Some make this to be the sense of my text; it is not my own integrity that can free me from the stroke of God's hand; though I am not wicked, yet I am not exempt from affliction.

All things come alike to all, and the best men may be the most afflicted: "Waters of a full cup are wrung out to them, they are chastened every morning." It is no sign of God's hatred, but rather of his love, to correct his dearest children; yea, to strike them with death. It is true, righteousness delivereth from spiritual and eternal death, but not natural; "Moses my servant is dead." "Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?" We must needs die; it is the royal statute of heaven. Men's holiness and believing prayers cannot secure them from this stroke, as daily experience testifies.

Fourthly, The reasons whence it is, that none can deliver out of the hands of God.

1. God's sovereignty and man's subjection. His kingdom ruleth over all, he is supreme Lord and Lawgiver of the vast universe; celestial, terrestrial, and even infernal creatures are under his command and control. God put the greatest monarch on earth seven years apprentice to the beasts of the field, to learn this great lesson of the Almighty's sovereignty; "All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: none can say unto him, what doest thou?" Dan. iv. 35. Things must be as God orders them.

2. God's power and man's weakness. God is Almighty: this is his essential property whereby he can do all things. He created the world, hangeth the earth upon nothing, and will burn it at the last day. He upholds all things by the word of his power, and can dissolve all in an instant: who then is able to stand before him? "Behold the nations are as the drop of a bucket; yea, all nations before him are as nothing, yea, less than nothing and vanity," Isa. xl. 15, 17. Who then can resist him?

3. The holiness of God and sinfulness of man. He

is glorious in holiness. "The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works," Psal. cxlv. 17. Never could any of the sons of Adam challenge him for an irregular act, from the beginning of the world to this day. All that have known God have vindicated him, and condemned themselves; for God is righteous, and man is punished for his sins. As sinners cannot rescue out of God's hand; so, if they judged aright they would not attempt to deliver themselves, but say as David, "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me," Psalm cxix. 75.

4. The wisdom of God and man's foolishness. Alas, what would man do with himself if he were able to rescue himself out of God's hand? Cannot God dispose of him, better than he can of himself? Is not his understanding infinite? Cannot God extract a medicine out of a cup of poison, and make the worst things work the greatest good for his children? God is good to all, abundant in goodness and truth, and "he doeth good to them that be good;" yea, he doth good by the most unlikely means; he chastens his people that he may "humble them, prove them, and do them good in the latter end." It would be madness then, for foolish man to desire a deliverance out of the hands of such a God, whose works are wrought in number, weight, and measure, and who disposeth all things for the best.

Use first, Of instruction to inform us,

1. That there is a God, in opposition to atheists who say in their hearts, there is no God; yea, some say it with their tongues, but too many in their lives. That was a proud Pharaoh who said, "Who is the Lord? I know not the Lord that I should let Israel go: I will not let Israel go." But God made him know his power and justice before he had done with

him; even the stoutest devils in hell feel his hand, and cannot but believe that there is a God, and that none can deliver them out of his hand: there are no atheists in hell, whatever there may be on earth.

2. God alone is an absolute sovereign over the whole universe, who uncontrollably rules the world, and hath a chain with which he binds men and devils. Men may contradict his commanding will, but cannot contradict his disposing and punishing will; "Who would not fear thee, O King of nations?" God works immediately or mediately, and when he useth means it is not for want of power in him, but in his goodness to us to communicate dignity to the creatures in their instrumentality; for there is no restraint to the Lord, to save by many or by few, by any instruments or none at all.

3. It is wonderful condescension that the great God will concern himself about sorry man, who humbleth himself to behold things in heaven and in the earth. "What is man that thou shouldst magnify him, and that thou shouldst set thine heart upon him," Job vii.

17. It is an act of God's care and faithfulness when he takes pains to scourge rather than forsake us; we are indebted to him for a rod of love, but much more for deliverance out of affliction, and advancing us by his right hand. It was this made David twice break out into the exclamation, "What is man that thou art mindful of him, and takest knowledge of him?"

4. Adore the infinite grace of God in Christ, in the blessed contrivance of the gospel. Men had sold themselves to sin and Satan, but Jesus Christ came to deliver those forlorn captives, by price and by power, by the price of his blood, and power of his Spirit. He delivers souls from the wrath to come, he is mighty, he led captivity captive at his ascension; in his lowest state of

humiliation on the cross, he spoiled principalities and powers, made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it. All the devils in hell cannot keep a poor child of divine love, whom God will set at liberty ; none can deliver out of his hands but Christ. O admire this redeeming love of God, which brings along with it both temporal blessings and spiritual deliverance. "This man shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land," Micah v. 5.

Use second, Of conviction.

1. As to public affairs both in church and state. If God deliver us over into the hands of our enemies, though they be but wounded men, they shall prevail. If men refuse to drink of this cup, yet the Lord saith, "Ye shall certainly drink." Valiant armies, numerous forces, and high fortifications cannot secure us from inundations of divine wrath, when God puts a people to shame and silence for their sin. We may please ourselves with power and policy, but they are insignificant things against divine vengeance. There is a season when a nation's iniquity is full, then they will be destroyed and none can deliver. When the ephah is full, the talent of lead is put on the mouth, and the wings carry it into its proper place of irrevocable destruction. When iniquity abounds, love decays ; when there are few intercessions, much confidence in an arm of flesh, and great ingratitude for former deliverances, God may justly say, "I will deliver you no more ;" and we may have apprehensions and fears.

2. As to particular persons. Let careless sinners tremble. Consider, O poor sinner, who forgettest God, "lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." There are the following considerations that lock the sinner under divine wrath :—

Adam's sin left you prisoners in the hand of justice. By nature you are children of wrath. Every act of sin sinks you deeper, and binds you faster in this low dungeon; for the wages of sin is death. Satan like a jailor is dragging you to sin, and will execute sentence of death at last. The righteous law of God also confirms the sentence; for we are shut up, and kept prisoners under the law. Hell is the jail in which the prisoners will be kept till they have paid the utmost farthing. Death will open the door for a sinner's admission into this woful state, and shut the door of hope. Souls in that state are reserved together with devils in chains of darkness, against the judgment of the great day. Sinners may be cast into this miserable dungeon unawares, and die with a lie in their right hand. None but Christ can deliver any out of the hands of justice, and translate them into glorious liberty. None will be finally redeemed by Christ, but such as are sanctified and purified for himself, as a peculiar people zealous of good works. O then, if all this be true, what will become of poor graceless and Christless souls. Heaven is shut against you, hell is gaping for you, and if once damned, damned for ever, for there is a great gulf fixed, and there is no escaping from the infernal lake. O that sinners in Zion were afraid, that fearfulness would surprise the hypocrites, that they may be prevented from falling into this devouring fire, these everlasting burnings. Lord, open their eyes, and turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and eternal inheritance.

Use third, Of admonition.

1. To sinners. Examine your state, and consider in whose hands you are, either of God or the devil, of mercy or justice. Lord, open the eyes of these men that

they see; the discovery of danger is a step towards a remedy. Poor sinner, thou art in invisible chains, and Satan holds his black hand over thine eyes; "Awake thou that sleepest and Christ shall give thee light." Observe the Spirit's operations. When a light shines into the prison, observe if the angel of the Lord do not smite thee on thy sides and raise thee up; then follow him, and thy chains will fall off. Who can tell, but if thou wilt own the next gracious influence, it may set thee a step nearer to God? "Quench not the Spirit," comply with divine calls, put your hand into God's, and he will bring you towards himself. Renounce all sin. The throne of iniquity hath no fellowship with God. "Wash you, make you clean, put away your doings out of his sight," and then come near to God, you shall become acquainted and be familiar with him, and shall be secured in the hollow of his hand. You cannot serve two masters. Give up yourselves to the Lord, first your souls, then your bodies, as instruments of righteousness. You cannot expect that God will take you into his hands till you have put yourselves there. David saith, "Into thy hand I commend my spirit." The apostle Peter enjoins it, "Let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as to a faithful Creator."

2. To saints.

(1.) To such as are under God's hand. If you see not how you can be delivered, do not despond. Say not as David, "I shall one day perish." Put on patience, and let it have its perfect work, and look through the thick cloud. After darkness comes light.* Own God's hand in your affliction, and lay it not on instruments. Job said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken

* *Post tenebras spero lucem.*

away." Thus justify God in all, for it is fit it should be so. Desire rather that affliction may be sanctified, than removed: pray more to be fitted for deliverance than released from the trouble: underrate not your mercies; get faster hold of God by faith and prayer: say as Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Still own him as a Father, and he will own you as a child; thus glorify God in the fire.

(2.) To you that have been delivered, I may say, give God the praise of your deliverance: return back to give thanks. Love God more for himself. Benefits may be inducements, but God himself is the only adequate object of your dearest affections: David twice professed his strong love after he had been in affliction. Tell others what God hath done for you, in suitable language and behaviour: let your lives be walking bibles, and live as persons raised from the dead. Long to be with God in heaven, not so much to be totally free from the Lord's hand of affliction, as to be in his bosom by immediate communion.

Use fourth, Of consolation to God's children.

Though God's hand be heavy upon you and none can deliver you from it, yet he is a Father still; though perhaps offended, yet he is not a sin-avenging judge: this latter case would be dreadful, but the former eligible. Compare 2 Sam. xxiv. 14, with Heb. x. 31. His scourging as a father is a branch of the gospel covenant. As none can deliver you out of God's correcting hand, so none can pluck you out of his fatherly hand: our Lord Jesus testifies both of himself and his Father, who is greater than all. While you are in his hand he never looks off from you, you are engraven on the palms of his hands, and he takes special care of you in his providence. Remember if you are never delivered out of God's hand of affliction, death will set you at liberty.

There are two choice cordials, 1 Cor. x. 13, to assure you, that you shall be enabled to bear your affliction, and that in due time you shall have a way to escape.

To conclude. Let the children of God be animated and encouraged in their sufferings from God and for God. Though they may be sharp and long, and no human help can avail to rescue you, God can and will, and you may say as the three children in Dan. iii. 17, "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king." The Lord will deliver you by his hand of mercy, out of the hand of justice, yea, from the evil work of sin in the soul, and will preserve you unto his heavenly kingdom. Study the promises, reflect on experience, live by faith, be much in prayer, sanctify God's name, and learn obedience by what you suffer under God's hand, and you will find all things work together for your good, though you cannot discern it at present. Happy souls! who trust in God and live by faith in evil times.

*Est Deus in cælo, qui pollens omnia curat,
Credentes nusquam deservisse potest.*

There is a God in heaven, who will not leave
Such souls on earth, as to him ever cleave.

END OF VOL. III.