

LIFE IN GOD'S FAVOUR;

A DISCOURSE

ADAPTED TO

DEATH-THREATENING TIMES.

THE EPISTLE TO THE READER.

CHRISTIAN READER,

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

* Isa. xxvii. 11.

† John vii. 49.

‡ Luke xvi. 15.

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

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

† Jer. xxii. 13, 17, 19, 21, 26.

§ Rev. xviii. 3.

¶ Jer. vii. 4.

† Psalm x. 3.

|| Ezek. xxviii. 3.

** Jer. xiii. 11, 14.

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

* Matt. xi. 20—24.

† Rev. iii. 16, 17.

‡ Luke xiii. 26.

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

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

* Mal. iv. 1.

adversity there is an apparent discovery of the necessity of divine special favour. When God giveth quietness who then can make trouble, and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him? * Then indeed in the day of calamity, God's favour is seen to be seasonable, when the favour of men is lost, and all things look black about us. O the joy and comfort souls have felt in the light of God's countenance, one smile from heaven hath fetched the saints from death to life.

Hence it is, that God's children have desired of the Lord some tokens of love, while they have been in this vale of tears. Let no man scoff at this, the Scripture warrants it: "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."—Jer. xxxiii. 3. So our Saviour, "He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and manifest myself to him."—John xiv. 21. This is a sufficient warrant for our prayers and expectations in God's way, for as the word of promise encourageth us, so the word of precept directeth and regulateth our desires; certainly God hath promised great things to believers who keep in his way, and hath made good his promises on all occasions, in all ages.

What that token for good was which the princely prophet David prays for, Psalm lxxxvi. 17, I will not positively determine; but sure I am, it was some evidence of God's favour to him, either in a miraculous or gracious way, in ordinances or in providence, by way of influence or evidence, for quickening or comforting his heart. I confess, if this holy man, this man after God's own heart, had some special ground to expect extraordinary manifestations being made to him, or for him, it becomes not us to follow him therein, except we had the like ground either as to external or internal things, lest we provoke God, and ruin ourselves by enthusiastic presumptions. Sleidan in his Commentaries, † gives us a large account of Thomas Munster in Alstet, a town belonging to the Duke of Saxony in Thuringia, who exclaimed against Luther, as giving too much liberty: "For," saith he, "the body must be made lean with fasting, there should be simple apparel, the countenance must be framed to gravity, a man should speak seldom, wear a long beard," &c.

* Job xxxiv. 29.

† Book 5, fol. 55.

But to the purpose, he taught his followers to ask of God a sign, whereby he might testify that he cared for them, and that they were of the true religion; and albeit he shewed not a token soon, yet must they nevertheless proceed, pray still, expostulate, yea, complain loudly of God, that he dealt not well with them. Oh blasphemy! "This expostulation and anger," saith he, "is of God well accepted, for that he perceiveth hereby our earnest mind and zeal, and then no doubt, being thus urgently solicited, he will declare himself by some notable sign, and quench the thirst of our minds, dealing with us as he did in times past with the old fathers." And then he makes a long speech to his followers, who were eight thousand, tells them they must not be afraid of their adversaries' guns: "For all the bullets they shoot," saith he, "I will receive with my coat. Behold," saith he, "what a merciful God we have, behold a sign or token of his everlasting good-will towards us, lift up your eyes, and see the rainbow in the sky, for seeing we have the same painted in our ensign, God declareth plainly, that he will aid us in battle, and destroy the tyrants, wherefore set upon them with a bold courage." They sung a song, and thereby call for the help of the Holy Ghost; but when the ordnance played upon them, they were amazed and overwhelmed, saith the historian, neither defending themselves, nor seeking safety by flight, trusting to Munster's promise, and looking for help from heaven; but they were miserably deceived, they were scattered, three thousand were slain, three hundred beheaded, Frankuse taken, and Munster put upon the rack. This story I mention to shew the danger of a delusion, and imagination of tokens from heaven, as in their case:

1. In open rebellion against lawful magistrates.
2. For confirmation of their religion.
3. Importuning and wrangling with God without a word of promise.
4. Charging God foolishly if he deny, &c.

We may call these truly fanatics, as Calvin oft doth; and whoever build their religion upon the like weak and sandy foundation, will find it insufficient, and themselves deceived. God's children own none but a Bible religion, and dare not expect any thing of God, but what they have a scripture war-

rant for in precept or precedent : but how far believers in succeeding ages may imitate the saints in scripture story, asking of God a sign, and enjoying it, I shall not at present discuss. It is true, history tells us of the nobles of Bohemia,* being to suffer the next day for the testimony of Christ, spent the night in prayer, singing the eighty-sixth Psalm, oft repeating the last petition, "Shew me a token for good;" one of them said, "Be of good cheer, for even in this God hath heard your voice, to-morrow he will shew some wonderful sign, whereby he will witness that we suffer for his cause." In the morning presently after sun-rising, a beautiful bow appeared, and compassed the heavens, the martyrs looked out at a window, and saw a rainbow of an unusual colour, though the heavens were clear, and there had been no rain for two days before; on which they fell on their faces, lifted up their hands and voices, praised God for this sign shewed from heaven, and afterwards suffered cheerfully that day for the truth. Another in the Marian days cried out at the stake, "Son of God, shine upon me;" immediately the sun in the firmament shone on him, though it was a dark and cloudy day. Many other instances I might produce, with which church histories abound, which it becomes not us to question, since God may grant peculiar dispensations to his suffering servants, in extraordinary cases, out of his usual course, but it is not safe for us to prescribe, or to expect that God should gratify our curiosity; we have a more sure word of prophecy contained in the holy scriptures,† which are able to make us wise unto salvation, yea, to make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished to every good work. If we leave this scriptural way, and look for tokens from God in any other way, we expose ourselves to the danger of being deceived by lying wonders, and Satanical delusions.‡ The devil would have persuaded Augustine to seek a sign from God, but he would not, because he saw many deluded by such apparitions, and therefore saith, "He that now expects miracles, is himself the greatest miracle," that is, of unbelief. Satan hath often transformed himself into an angel of light, and imposed upon credulous superstition. Gerson tells how Satan appeared to a

* Clark's Martyr. p. 170. † 2 Pet. i. 19. Eph. ii. 20. 2 Tim. iii. 15, 17.

‡ 2 Thess. ii. 9.

holy man in a most glorious manner,* professing himself to be Christ, saying, he appeared to him because he deserved respect before others, but he answered I desire not to see my Saviour in this vale of tears, it shall suffice me to see him in the heavens, *Sit, in alio sæculo non in hoc, visio tua, merces mea*, “let in the other world, not in this, the vision of thee be my reward.” The same we find appeared to Luther, in the form of a crucified Christ upon the wall, but on his solemn protestation the apparition immediately vanished.

It becomes God’s people to adhere to the law and testimony, and to desire and welcome such tokens of God’s favour as these:—

1. God’s holy ordinances. God gave the Sabbath to Israel as a sign of his being their God; Exod. xxxi. 13. The ark was a token of his presence, so are the word and sacraments to us. God forbid such a day should come on us, not to see our signs; Psal. lxxiv. 9. Better, said the people of Antioch, want the shining of the sun, than the preaching of Chrysostom.

2. The fruit of ordinances. If this and that man be born in Zion, it is a good sign of God’s favour, and that God will establish it; Psal. lxxxvii. 5. Oh! where is the spirit of the Lord? where is the Lord God of Elijah? It would be a rich mercy to see a day of his power when people are made willing.

3. A spirit of adoption, of grace and supplication stirred up. When God prepares the heart, it is a sign he will cause his ear to hear; Psal. x. 17. A spirit of sloth in this respect is a sad token of God’s anger and absence; Isa. lxiv. 7.

4. A penitent reforming spirit. This was a token of good to Israel, Hag. i. 14, also to Nineveh, Jonah iii. 8. An unmanageable, unframeable spirit in a people, portends greater blows, Amos iv. 11. 12. And in our own individual cases, let us be earnest with God for sanctifying grace, which is a singular token of his special favour, and a sign the second death shall not have power over us, Rev. xx. 6. His Spirit being in us is a sign of our interest in him, and resurrection with him, Rom. viii. 9, 11. Let us beg of him direction; some token for a way-mark to keep in God’s way, the King of heaven’s high road to the new Jerusalem, for this is a covenant mercy, Isa.

* De Probatione Spiritus.

xlvi. 17. Let us beg a special pledge for our protection and preservation, so far as is consistent with his heavenly pleasure, to be a mourner's mark in an evil day, Ezek. ix. 4. Let us beg of God some token of his affection for our satisfaction, some incomes of his grace, and sealings of his Spirit, which may be a blessed earnest of our future happiness, Eph. i. 13, 14. The earnest is part of the payment, so these comforts of grace are grapes of Canaan, morsels of the upper table, preludes and foretastes of eternal enjoyments. Suppose we were all malefactors, and the king offers a sealed pardon, and withal declares, that such as have not the great seal to shew, must suffer at the next assizes; but such as have, must be received to favour, and honoured. The case is ours: O with what running, seeking, using friends, begging, enduring difficulties and trials, should we be content, that we may have a sealed evidence of the King of heaven's favour. Let the mocking Michals, and scoffing Ishmaels of the world say what they please, it is worth seeking, striving for, prizing and admiring: when God saith, "Seek my face," why should not our souls echo, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek," Psal. xxvii. 8.

This is the design of the small Treatise now put into your hands; and O that God would accompany our endeavours with his blessing, and second our preaching and printing, to begin and complete the great match between Jesus Christ and poor sinners; he hath drawn up the articles, and proposed them to you by us, his holy words speak his willingness, these want nothing now but your consent, and the match is made. O sinners, we bring you letters of love and kindness from our beloved, we shew you his excellency, we disclose the large dowry he offers you, the fair house you shall dwell in with him, the pains he hath taken for you; whether all this will prevail we cannot tell, but if this be the last sentence I must write, or you read, I do by these presents summon you to answer this address before the dread tribunal of the great Judge at the last day, when this amongst other witnesses shall stand on record against you. If you entertain not this our gospel, and be not found in God's favour, ministers that warned you, at that day must say, Amen to your just condemnation. But we would rather present you

as chaste virgins to Christ, as accepted of God and approved of men.

It is our work to preach and write, yours to hear and read, and God's work to give success; we therefore follow these poor endeavours with our prayers to the Father of spirits, for converting and confirming grace, that thou Reader mayest increase in favour with God and man, as our Saviour did, that we may at last give up our account with joy, and not with grief, and that those who sow, and those who reap, may rejoice together; which is the earnest prayer of,

Thy soul's friend,

OLIVER HEYWOOD.

November 9th. 1678.

LIFE IN GOD'S FAVOUR.

PSALM XXX. 5.

———*In his favour is life.*

CHAP. I.

INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS.

THE title of this psalm is, “A psalm and song, at the dedication of the house of David.” What this dedication means, or with what ceremonies it was performed, or what house it was that was dedicated, I shall not decide; or to what time it refers, whether his first inhabiting of his house, or re-possession after Absalom’s defiling it, I shall not here determine. The psalm itself may well be called, A divine miscellany of christian experiences; I shall enumerate a few of them.

1. David’s exalting God in praises, who had elevated him in mercy, verse 1, “I will extol thee, O Lord, for thou hast lifted me up.” A good man advanced by God, will highly advance God: the higher our state is, the more elevated must be our praises: when God magnifies us, the more we should glorify God. This is a Christian’s duty and practice.

2. David’s cry, and God’s gracious assistance, verse

2, "I have cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me." Cheap medicine! it was but a mournful complaint, and God came with a healing hand. God is a ready and successful physician. Pardoning grace healed his soul; a merciful providence healed his body, estate, and name.

3. David's resurrection from the grave, and preservation from the pit, verse 3: he was at the grave's mouth, or in a grave of banishment, but brought back; and as to soul-terrors, near the pit of hell by despair or temptations, but prevented.* The grave of temporal afflictions, and the pit of eternal torments may be waiting for the saints, and they may be wonderfully snatched out of both. How oft is there but a step betwixt them and death really, and in their apprehension?

4. David's warm heart in God's praises, wherein he not only employs himself, but all God's people to help him in praising God, verse 4, "Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of his." A praying soul will be a praising soul; the more God's people pray, the more occasion have they for praise, and an individual believer cannot lift up God's praise high enough, a concert is fittest in this music: hence heaven is the proper place of praise, where that blessed choir of saints and angels will for ever echo forth God's glory. Holy souls are only fit to celebrate the memory of his holiness.

5. David's tasting both wrath and love in a short space, verse 5, "His anger is but a moment," that is, endureth for a short space, but there are quick returns of favour. Wrath is wont to come before love, death precedes life, a storm before a calm; a strong wind, earthquake, and fire go before the still small voice;† the

* Sepulchrum, fovea, vel infernum.

† 1 Kings xix. 11, 12.

law before the gospel ; John the Baptist before our Saviour, that God's children may by a night of darkness be prepared for, and learn to prize a morning of light.

6. David's carnal confidence in a prosperous state, verse 6, "In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved," that is, thus I talked with myself when I was in abundance, health, and quietness. O deceitful heart ! A healthful man thinks not of sickness.* God built him a house, he builds himself a castle, but it is in the air. A deceitful heart allures a good man into a fool's paradise. When things go well, security kills us ; when God shines in his transfiguring mount, we will build tabernacles, but observe it, this is David's mount which stood through God's favour.

7. David's sudden reverse, verse 7, "Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled." Self-mounted, soon dismounted, when a frown came into God's brow, it soured all my pleasure. The turning away of God's face overturns the soul's hopes and joys, God's hand is at the foot of our mountain, and if his countenance frown, and he withdraw his supporting hand, our mount falls into the valley of discouragement, if not despair ; we are mere dependents.

8. David's importunate expostulation, verse 8—10, "I cried to thee O Lord :"—How often do God's children, like our volatile children, change their note, alter their tune ? Singing and sighing are near neighbours. They say the limner can with one dash of his pencil turn a laughing into a weeping face : thus doth God ; David was erewhile so full of joy that he calls all the saints to help him in praise, now he musters up all his energies to complain, pray, and expostulate. Prayer is the language of grief, as praise is of joy.

9. David's comfortable transition, verse 11, his

* *In abundantia tranquillitatis.*

mourning is turned into dancing, sackcloth into gladness; a sudden and wonderful change, bitter turned into sweet, darkness into light, hell into heaven. O what can God do, and what strange effects doth heart-joy produce! The man that was grovelling upon the earth is now raised up, and exults in the sprightly movements of a cheerful dance,* as one set at liberty out of the restraint and darkness of a troublesome prison, he puts off his filthy rags, or rather, strait and coarse coat of sackcloth, and is clothed with the robe of righteousness, and garments of salvation. O what a metamorphosis!

10. David's due sense of God's chief end and design in all this, verse 12, "To the end that my glory may sing praise to thee." His glory is the best thing he hath, his tongue, say some, his soul, say others; I say both soul and body must join to celebrate God's praises. Nor shall we repent of sounding God's praise: the more we praise God, the more occasions of praise God will minister to us "But I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more."

Thus much for the context. In all this we may discern what ups and downs God's servants are subject to in this weary world, like a seaman's tossing, or a traveller's road that lies up hill and down. And what variety of affections are excited upon several occasions in the hearts of God's children, joy and sorrow, fear and boldness, desire and aversion, take their turns, and act their several parts in a Christian's breast.

But to come to the words, in which we have night and day, thunder and lightning, the dark and the bright side of a Christian's cloud, law and gospel, wrath and love set opposite to each other, and compared, wherein consider:—

* In chorum, i. e. gaudium solenne intimum ac maximum.

First, How the words are introduced.

Secondly, Wherein the comparison lies.

1. The words come in as a satisfying answer to a tacit objection thus formed : Alas, saith the gracious soul, how should I help in this blessed duty of praise, as is required, verse 4, for alas ! I feel God's anger upon me, I lie under tokens of displeasure, how can I sing and give thanks ?

(1.) He answers this by a concession, be it so, yet it is fit there should be an interchanging succession of joy and sorrow, as of day and night.

(2.) Sorrow like an unwelcome guest will lodge all night, but a blessed morning is coming, which will dispel the thick clouds of a sad night.

(3.) It is but a short night, his anger endureth but a moment, it is but short, though sharp ; it will not be always, nor long.

(4.) It is worth waiting for, his favour will recompense poor afflicted expectants, for in his favour is life.

2. The comparison lies, betwixt God's wrath and his favour, in reference to the nature and duration of both.

(1). In the nature, properties, and effects. God's wrath begets night, that is, sorrow, sadness ; for night in scripture oft imports sorrow. How can the afflicted soul refrain from weeping sore in the night,* when the sun of righteousness is withdrawn. If the wrath of a king be as messengers of death, surely God's wrath must be death to the soul ; but now in God's favour there is life ; a man, a believer lives by the bright shining of God's face.

(2.) They are compared in their duration. God's wrath is but for a moment, for a night, that is, there

* Lam. i. 2.

is a season of God's frowning and scourging, which at longest can only endure, with respect to God's people, the term of their natural life; whilst his favour continues not only as long as natural life, but runs parallel with the life of the soul and line of eternity.

This former part of the verse appears intricate, because brief and concise, the latter part seems an illustration thereof by an excellent rhetorical allusion. *His anger*, his rod or whip; for when God is angry he inflicts punishment; anger is short, indignation more severe, yet both do not reach hatred. God's anger is manifested by its effects; when he scourgeth, as men do when angry, it is the fruit of vindictive or punitive justice, for he is not angry as men are.

But the words lie thus, *a moment in his anger*,* it is only momentary; *in his favour life*, his love is lasting, yea, everlasting: so life is opposed to a moment. The sense of the words is this: although for our sins God may sometimes be angry with us, yet in due time he manifests his good pleasure, which calls us back from death to life, wherein otherwise we should die with horror and despair here, and eternal shame and confusion hereafter.

Some indeed read the words thus,† making life refer to the former sentence, and his favour to the latter, *life* or lives, that is, the longest, sweetest life of men is *a moment in his anger*, or is momentary; in his good will, that is, when his favour sweetly breathes on us, weeping may lodge with us in the night, but joy comes in the morning. The former part is parallel to that complaint in Psal. xxxix. 5, "Behold, thou hast made my days as a hand-breadth." And that expression is like it, Psal. xc. 5, "For all our days are passed away in thy wrath." But the reading which we have

* Momentum in irâ suâ. † Vid. Mr. Pool's Syn. Critic. in loc.

in our Bibles is generally preferred for several good reasons. I shall wave further explication, and also raising observations, and propose this as the doctrine to be treated of in the words of the text, which is an entire proposition, that, "In God's favour is life."

There is life in God's love, or God's love is a Christian's life.

It is a scripture truth asserted by David here, being inspired by the Holy Ghost; and Moses saith the same, Deut. xxx. 20, "For he is thy life, and the length of thy days," that is, not formally, but effectively, by mentioning the effect, he is the cause of thy life, or herein consisteth thy life to obey and enjoy him.

In prosecution of this doctrine I shall confine myself to the following inquiries:—

1. What this favour of God is, and what this life?
 2. In what respect God's favour is life?
 3. To whom, and in what seasons it is life?
 4. Why God's people account his favour life?
- And so come to an application.

CHAP. II.

ON THE FAVOUR OF GOD AND THE LIFE WHICH IT COMPRISES OR PRODUCES.

I. WE are to inquire, what is God's favour? and what is life? I shall put both these together, and so explain the terms briefly.

The word in the first language signifies, will, good

will, good pleasure ;* Deut. xxxiii. 23, "O Naphtali, satisfied with favour, full with the blessing of the Lord." The latter sentence explains the former; when God is pleased to bless persons, they have his favour, and it is that which will satisfy them. It also signifies acceptance, Isa. lx. 7, "They shall come up with acceptance," or *favour*, or *good will*,† "on mine altar." It is the same word as here. Once more, sometimes our English version renders it desire, Psal. cxlv. 19, "He will fulfil the desire," *good will*, "of them that fear him." But as applied here to God, it imports God's great regard for his creatures, and it is fourfold.

1. God's favour is his goodness in the ordinary course of his providence towards all, even to the worst of men, Isa. xxvi. 10, "Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness." And this is our natural life, both as to the origin and maintaining of it, good and bad have their dependence upon God's providence; for he holdeth our soul in life, Psal. lxvi. 9. God doth not do as workmen that make an artificial engine, and set it a-going, and so leave it to itself, but his favour preserves our being and well-being; Job x. 12, "Thou hast granted me life and favour, and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit." By favour is meant either that life is a favour, or that beneficence whereby we are supplied with all needful accommodations. The heathens knew this,‡ and their poets sung it, as Paul quotes Aratus and others, Acts xvii. 28, "For we are also his offspring." So that the stoutest champion and proudest emperor on earth depend upon God's favour and courtesy, whether they shall live another moment; so Daniel informs a

* Voluntas, benevolentia, beneplacitum. † Ad beneplacitum.

‡ Vid. Pool's Syn. Critic. in loc.

mighty monarch, chap. v. 23, "God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways." O that all men did but live under a sense of this great truth, that in God's favour is their life.

2. By God's favour are meant some signal acts of discriminating Providence. Thus God shewed favour to Israel his peculiar people, Psal. xlv. 2, 3, God drove out the heathen, that is, the seven nations of Canaan, and planted his people in their room. Why did he so? The Psalmist answers, "not by their sword or arms, but" positively, "by thy right hand and thine arm, because thou hadst a favour unto them." God's favour was their armour and artillery, this produced weapons for them, both offensive and defensive: hence Psal. v. 12, "For thou Lord wilt bless the righteous, with favour wilt thou compass* him as with a shield." This produceth our comfortable, safe, happy life, which is emphatically called *life*: so 1 Sam. xxv. 6, "Thus shall ye say to him that liveth," that is, that lives prosperously, joyfully, comfortably. And 1 Thess. iii. 8, "Now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord," that is, we live a life of joy; for as Rebecca said of her sad and sorrowful life, Gen. xxvii. 46, "I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth, if Jacob take such an one, what good shall my life do me?" For a life of sorrows is a dying life, scarce worth the name of life in the account of one bitter in soul. But now God's favour produceth deliverances, comfortable provisions, resurrection from death to life, and all accommodations. Thus God raised Hezekiah from a mortal disease, thus he lighted David's candle,† and thus he prevents a thousand dangers, and loads us with multitudes of blessings, whereby our lives are rendered comfortable. And what is the ground of all this? why, God's favour.

* *Coronabo eum. Heb. crown.* † Isa. xxxviii. Psal. xviii. 28.

Consult Psal. xci. 4, 14—16. Psal. lxxxv. 1—3. O consider this, it is by God's favour that our life is not a hell, but so near akin to paradise.

3. By God's favour, the scripture often means the special fruits of God's distinguishing grace, vouchsafed to his own children, and to none else. Psalm cvi. 4, "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour of thy people;" that is, the favour thou bearest to thy people, as our translation explains it: then it follows, "O visit me with thy salvation." This is peculiar grace flowing from the spring of everlasting love, producing all the streams that feed spiritual life in the soul. From the fountain of God's favour flows converting grace, which puts a seed of spiritual life into the heart, whereby we live unto God, 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. It is the favour of benevolence, whereby God first makes us his people, 1 Sam. xii. 22. It is the favour of complacency, whereby God takes delight in his people, Zeph. iii. 17, and here originate all the precious fruits of gospel grace, the giving of his Son,* the preaching of the gospel, the sanctification of souls, their justification, their communion with God, and eternal salvation. All the privileges that saints enjoy on this side heaven, and in heaven, proceed from the favour of God, and so God's favour is our life spiritual and eternal, yea, a living faith, and the life of faith is God's gift, and a fruit of this favour.† This is life eternal begun, this indeed is a life worthy of being called life, without which we are but dead men morally, and must die eternally. But the good will or favour of God gives such water to his saints, as shall be in them a well of water springing up to everlasting life, John iv. 14. No wonder then if David so earnestly desires this favour of God, without which he was not a saint, nor accepted: Psal.

* John iii. 16.

† Eph. ii. 8. John xvii. 3.

cxix. 132, "Look thou upon me," that is, with a propitious, favourable aspect, "and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name." All have mercies, but all have not tender mercies, of which David makes great account : * this distinguishing kindness and especial favour create a spiritual life.

4. There is one thing more which this favour imports, namely, the sense and feeling of this favour of God in the soul, produced by a delightful and satisfying manifestation of it to the soul. This David intends, Psalm cxix. 58, "I entreated thy favour† with my whole heart," that is, David longs not only for the fruits of God's favour in his soul, but the shining of God's face upon him, the sweet assurance of God's special love : Psalm xxxi. 16, "Make thy face to shine upon thy servant," which elsewhere is called the beauty of the Lord. ‡ This David makes the reason of that one thing begged, that he might dwell in God's house ; and all God's servants have sought for it, and looked upon it as their life, light, help, and health. Psalm lxxx. 3, "Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved." And Psalm lxvii. 1, 2, "God be merciful to us, and bless us, and cause his face to shine upon us, that thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations." It is an expression borrowed from men, that when they are well pleased with their friends, they look cheerfully upon them, which begets joy and comfort in their drooping acquaintance : Prov. xvi. 15, "In the light of the king's countenance is life, and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain." Even so when God beholds his children with a cheerful countenance, it animates, exhilarates, and revives their drooping spirits. So

* Psalm lxix. 16. † *Heb.* face. ‡ Psalm xc. 16, 17. xxvii. 4.

saith David, Psalm iv. 6, 7, " Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us : thou hast put gladness in my heart more than in the time that their corn and wine increased." David opposeth God's favour to the vast multitudes of his enemies, and instead of armies, he begs God's favour may be lifted up on his soul as a banner, for so the words import ; as if he had said, men have their friends and confederates to be kind auxiliaries to them, but I desire no other comfort than thy favour for me,* and the sense and assurance of thy love to me ; shew that thou hast a regard for me, and the brightness of thy smiling face will scatter mine enemies as a mist, or at least dispel those black clouds that sit upon my benighted spirit, and will bring day-light. O the joy that this creates ! not in face, but in heart, true, full, intimate, and satisfying : this is the only reviving *aqua vitæ* to the fainting spirits, that fetcheth a soul from death to life ; the storms of God's wrath kill the soul's comfort, and nip the buds of our hopes, but the sweet beams of divine love in the spring-time of God's gracious return, put life into the disconsolate soul ; even as a child is thunderstruck by his angry Father's frowns, but revived by friendly, affectionate smiles. This favour of God begets another life of divine joy, pleasure, and satisfaction : this is the life of heaven, a feeding upon the grapes of Canaan ; this is a blessed paradise, a little corner in the heavenly Jerusalem ; this is with the beloved disciple to lie on Jesus' bosom ; this is to have the joys of his salvation. It is true, this is not every one's privilege, but sometimes God doth graciously indulge his servants with the comfort of these sensible foretastes of heaven. When that eminent Scotch divine, Mr. Robert Bruce, in his dying moments, was asked by his friends

* Attolle in vexillum lucem vultus tui.

how it was with him, he answered, "When I was young I was diligent, and lived by faith in the Son of God; but now I am old, and not able to do much, yet he condescends to feed me with sensible enjoyments." And indeed this kind of life is, as it were, a kind of life of spiritual sense: Psalm lxxxix. 15—17, "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance.—In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted.—For thou art the glory of their strength: and in thy favour our horn shall be exalted." These two things, I suppose, are meant in this text, namely, the favour of distinguishing mercy which begets spiritual life in real saints, and the favour of God manifested to the soul, which creates a comfortable, joyful life: both these David intends here, especially the latter. If you ask further, whose favour this is in which is life? I answer, the favour of all the persons in the sacred Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost: you have them all mentioned in the valedictory benediction prescribed for the Priests, Numb. vi. 24—26. *The Lord bless thee and keep thee*: "Let God the Father, the fountain of blessings, the preserver of his creatures, bless thee with spiritual blessings, give thee grace, and preserve it in thee." *The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee*: "Let God the Son, the Sun of Righteousness irradiate thy soul with beams of gospel light and love, and shine into thy heart with the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."* *The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace*: "Let the good Spirit of God the Comforter bring the report of God's love to thee, make thy calling and election sure, apply to thee

* 2 Cor. iv. 6.

redeeming grace, and give thee the comfort thereof." The apostle expresses himself thus: "The peace of God that passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus; and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all. Amen."* This New Testament benediction answers to that in the Old, and both imply the peculiar blessings proper to these persons of the Trinity, and which are distributed to God's people. Yet withal we must take that rule which divines have laid down, that the works of the Trinity *ad extra*, with respect to things without, are undivided, and common to all the persons of the Trinity;† because the essence is common to all the persons, so are essential works. Hence creation is ascribed to the Son, redemption to the Father, sanctification both to Father and Son, as well as to the Holy Ghost. Hence divines lay down another rule, that one and the same operation in reference to the creature, in different respects may be either personal or essential; so Christ's incarnation inchoatively is an essential operation common to the Trinity, but terminatively, it is the personal operation of the Son alone. But how we may conceive of God in worship, or how to expect good from the persons of the Trinity, I shall say no more; but refer you to that choice man of God, and great instrument of good, Mr. Durham, in his Exposition of Revel. on ch. i. fol. 9—20.

One thing more I must add, that there is no saving favour shown by God to men, but only through Jesus Christ the sole mediator of the covenant. It is only by Christ that God is reconciled to sinners, Christ is the

* Phil. iv. 7. 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

† Opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa, seu omnibus personis communia.

great propitiation by whom an atonement is made : * God is through his sufferings and intercession pacified, and now at last shews himself friendly and favourable to believing souls ; for he saith, “ This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”—Matt. iii. 17. In whom, not only with his person, actings, sufferings, but through him, with all that come to God by him ; Eph. i. 6, “ To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted, or acceptable, in the beloved,” that is, in Jesus Christ the Son of his love. Never did one stream of grace issue out for sinners since the fall, but in this channel ; never did any beam of God’s favour savingly enlighten, enliven, or rejoice a believer’s heart, but in the face of Jesus Christ. Man having lost God’s favour by the fall, he will not act propitiously towards him again or receive him into favour, but in this gospel way of atonement.

CHAP. III.

THE FAVOUR OF GOD CONSIDERED AS LIFE.

II. How is the favour of God said to be life ? As his favour and life have been already described, I proceed to observe, that his favour is

The cause, the object, the rule, and the end of life.

1. God’s favour is the cause of life ; for “ every good thing comes down from the Father of lights.”—James i. 17. Every good gift of nature, accomplishment or accommodation, owns God’s favour for its author, and every perfect gift of special grace, comfort

* 2 Cor. v. 18. Col. i. 20, 21. Rom. iii. 25.

or glory is the blessed product of divine distinguishing love: grace and peace proceed from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus*—grace to make us good, and peace in the sense and feeling of this good; grace to make our souls acceptable to God, peace whereby we may be comfortable in ourselves. See this fully in Psalm xxxvi. 8, 9, “They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house, and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures.” Why so? “For with thee is the fountain of life.” Natural, spiritual, joyful, eternal life, all that is connected with our being or well-being is in God as in a fountain, whence the streams flow; for this fatness of God’s house, and river of pleasure is nothing else but the sense of God’s love, which depends on God as the author, “in whose presence is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore.”—Ps. xvi. 11.

2. God’s face or favour is the object of life, and indeed thus becomes the cause; the sight of God in Christ is the soul’s spiritual life. “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.”—John xvii. 3. By faith a soul sees him that is invisible, and faith is the soul’s life, the just live by faith.† All our present life of comfort consists in viewing the light of God’s countenance. When God hides his face poor David is troubled, Psalm xxx. 7; but when God shews his reconciled face, the drooping soul, like the sun-flower, begins to open, cheer, and revive. O the comfort this sight of God’s face and favour creates in the soul! And indeed heaven is nothing else but the beatific vision, or the seeing of God’s blessed countenance. When the heavenly courtiers get into the chamber of presence, and behold the King of Heaven’s face, they

* 1 Cor. i. 3.

† Heb. xi. 27. Hab. ii. 4.

shall need no more to complete their happiness. So Scripture testifies, Psalm xvii. 15. 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

3. God's favour is the rule of life, especially of a Christian's life.* A real saint acts according to this, squares his joys, sorrows, cares, fears, desires, delights, according to the sense or manifestations of God's favour, or his withdrawing from the soul: if the King smile he is cheered, if he frown he is cast down. So David expresses himself, "He hideth his face, I am troubled:" but Acts ii. 28, "Thou wilt make me full of joy with thy countenance." This is the regulator of a Christian's actions, duties, and graces, for God's favour influences all, actuates all. Nay, further, God's providential favour is the rule and measure of the natural life of creatures, Psalm civ. 29, "Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled, thou takest away their breath, they die and return to their dust."

4. But especially God's favour is the end of life; the destined end of all creatures' lives and actions is God's pleasure, Rev. iv. 11. They are subordinate to his will: Rom. xi. 36, "For of him, and through him, and to him are all things." All the creatures tend to God, as the lines to the centre; but as all a man's labours in his calling tend to uphold a frail natural life, so all a Christian's undertakings are for this, to maintain or obtain God's favour; his attending on God's ordinances is for this, Psalm xxvii. 4, "To behold the beauty of the Lord; "to see his power and glory in the sanctuary," Psalm lxiii. 1, 2. Why so? why, ver. 3, he saith, "Because thy loving-kindness is better than life:" my life is in it, but that is not all, for it is better than the life I live, my life would do me no good

* He dares do nothing but must have God's favour upon him therein. See Exod. xxxiii. 13, 16. Psalm xc. 16, 17. So it is his rule.

without it, therefore I would travel far to gain it. When the church had lost the sense of God's favour, see what pains she takes, Cant. iii. 1—5. She seeks him upon her bed, then she riseth, goeth about the city in the streets and broad ways, public and private ordinances, then inquires of the watchmen, faithful ministers. At another time, her soul failed when the sense of his favour was withdrawn, and she bids them tell him, by earnest prayer for her, that she was sick of love, she was fainting away.* Oh! what would the gracious soul do, be, endure, or lose, in order to enjoy God's favour. Why doth he pray, read, obey, give, but that he may comply with God's mind, and please the Lord. He would rather have God's favour than the favour of all the world besides. But more of this hereafter.

CHAP. IV.

THE DESCRIPTION OF PERSONS TO WHOM THE FAVOUR OF GOD IS LIFE, AND THE SEASONS IN WHICH THEIR EXPERIENCE CONFIRMS THIS TRUTH.

III. To whom, and at what times and seasons is God's favour life? I may say as to the preservation of natural life, God's providential favour is necessary every moment; but here I speak of God's special favour to the souls of his people, and of the manifestation thereof. Now there are some special seasons wherein persons lie under a strong conviction and impression that in God's favour is life. It is true, a

* Cant. v. 6—8.

Christian ought to lie, and will lie under a conviction, that in God's favour is life, both in religious duties and solemn ordinances, in the enjoyment of creature comforts and friendly relations. But I shall pass these, and pitch upon the following seasons, namely,

On first conversion,—in returning after backslidings,—in an afflicted state,—and on near approaches of death.

1. Young converts on the soul's first change and conversion to God, feel that his favour is life, and that in four respects.

(1.) In discovering God's way to the troubled soul. As soon as the secure sinner is pricked at the heart, and thoroughly awakened, he begins to cry out with the Jews and the jailor, "Men and brethren, what shall we do? Sirs, what shall I do to be saved?"* I want a friendly guide to set me into the right way, I have lost myself, and know not what to do, or which way to go; I have been so used to wander, that I know not which way to steer my course; I am now set fast, and see that if I step forward in my old track I am undone, another way I must take, and which way I cannot tell; my soul with weeping inquires the way to Zion; to heaven I would go, but know not the path.† For God's sake, ye ministers of Christ, give me your best advice what I must do; and O that God would favour me so much in this howling wilderness as to direct me in the right way to a city of habitation.‡ I have gone astray like a lost sheep upon the mountains of sin and error, and the way of peace I have not known; O that the Lord would make all his promises good to my soul for counsel and direction. Now God's favour in this work of guidance is expressed in such promises as these, which the bewildered soul must

* Acts ii. 37. xvi. 30.

† Jer. l. 4, 5.

‡ Psal. cvii. 6, 7.

make grounds of encouragement and matter of prayer : Psal. xxxii. 8. Isa. xxx. 21. xxxv. 8. xlviii. 17. Psal. xxv. 12, 14. Isa. xlii. 16. Luke i. 79.

(2.) A convinced sinner wants God's favour, and esteems it his life. If the Lord would give him a penitent heart, a heart to turn from all sin to God, he would be thankful, knowing that repentance is God's gift.* The poor soul is convinced of its necessity, difficulty, yea, its own inability to turn itself, and cries out, Lord, thou hast commanded me to turn myself, but that must be only to use the means wherein thou hast appointed me to obtain conversion, for thou art solely the proper efficient cause of this great work. Alas! I can no more convert myself than I can create myself; I cannot make one hair white or black, much less make my heart new or holy: this perfect gift comes from the Father of lights, and is a blessed effect of sovereign grace. Alas! though I see my way chalked out I cannot walk in it, I have a rebellious will; Lord, I fear thou hast not given me a heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear unto this day.† Now Lord fully awake me, thoroughly change me, renew my soul. O what a favour would I take a mourning, a repenting heart to be. I see the word will not do it; the rod will not do it; I have been "as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, turn thou me, and I shall be turned;"‡ and when I am savingly turned, I shall kindly repent: and I am the more encouraged to desire and ask this favour, because thou hast graciously made these precious promises—Deut. xxx. 6. Jer. xxiv. 7. Ezek. xi. 19. xxxvi. 25, 26.

(3.) He wants an interest in Jesus Christ. The poor convinced sinner sees nothing in the whole world that can do him any good; and as for his own righte-

* 2 Tim. ii. 25.

† Deut. xxix. 4.

‡ Jer. xxxi. 18, 19.

ousness, alas it is but as filthy rags, that rather defile than justify him;* and thus he cries out, Lord, now at last I see my own nakedness and wretchedness, I abhor myself, and all I am and have, therefore thou mayest justly abhor me;† I must have a righteousness better than my own to justify me; as for my own, the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it, and the covering narrower than that a man can wrap himself in it.‡ When I think of my past wicked life, and this wicked heart within me, and God's strict justice against sinners, and that I have nothing to screen and shelter me from it, I then say with David, "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"|| But I hear good news of a Saviour who is become a surety, an advocate, a propitiatory sacrifice for sinners:§ O that God would give me Christ! O for an interest in his Son! None but Christ, none but Christ, what would I give for him? Lord, shew me this favour, and I will ask nothing else; if I had Christ, I shall have enough, but how shall I come by him? only by believing, receiving the favour is the condition of receiving benefit by the favour. O but faith is the gift of God;¶ I cannot believe, my unbelief kills me; I sometimes think I will embrace Christ, but I want arms; I would run and come to him, but I want feet; I cannot reach him, many things beat me off my hold of him, I am not able to believe; the Spirit hath fully convinced me of my unbelief, hath broken down all my own faith, and told me I must have another manner of faith, even the faith of God's elect, an unfeigned faith, for without

* Isaiah lxiv. 6.

† Horreo quicquid de meo est.—*Luth.*

‡ Isaiah xxviii. 20.

|| Psalm cxxx. 3.

§ Heb. vii. 22. 1 John ii. 2. Rom. iii. 25.

¶ John i. 12. Eph. ii. 8.

such a faith, no Christ, without Christ, no hope of pardon, or heaven. O that God would graciously work this work of faith with power,* it is only an almighty power that can do it. O Lord, draw my unbelieving heart to thee with the attractive beams of thy favour and grace. I adhere to these promises for thy grace in this case, Jer. xxxi. 33. Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27. John vi. 37, 40, 44, 45. Rom. viii. 32.

(4.) One thing more a penitent wants of God on his first return to him, which is a favourable entertainment, a kind reception of the soul into favour. O! this would be worth all the world. Here the poor returning prodigal is at a loss, and dares not approach, but being conscious to himself of many misdemeanours, trembles to draw near to so glorious and dreadful a Majesty; with the publican he stands afar off, smiting his breast, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner;"† or with the prodigal, when returned to himself, his language on approaching God is, O Lord, guilt appals me, wrath alarms me, Satan and my own misgiving heart would drive me from thee, but the sense of my necessity puts me on to look for a remedy, and there is no help but in thyself; but how can such a wretch expect any relief from provoked Majesty? "I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son, yet make me as one of thy hired servants;"‡ let me but be taken into thy favour and family, and I am well pleased, though I be thrust down into the lowest place and office. O! what shall I say? Is there yet any mercy for a poor sinner? Will God ever look towards a rebel? Shall I ever obtain favour in his eyes? There is yet a possibility, there is yet room for a may be; it may be I shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger, it may be the Lord

* Eph. i. 19, 20.

† Luke xviii. 13.

‡ Luke xv. 17—19.

will be gracious to me; who knoweth but God will return to me in mercy? yea, who can tell but he will return and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that I perish not? * who can tell but that God hath thus long kept me out of hell that he may at last do my soul good, and bring me to heaven? Christ died for sinners, I am a sinner, he hath even had mercy on great sinners, Manasseh, Mary Magdalene, and Saul obtained mercy, † as patterns of future grace to others, I am much tossed betwixt hopes and fears, and cannot tell how it will be; if I look at myself I see nothing but grounds of despair, for I have grievously sinned; to me belongeth confusion of face, but to the Lord my God belong mercies and forgivenesses. ‡ Here is all my hope, this is the only ground of my expectation. And is there any hope for a forlorn wretch? O! the very possibility of obtaining his favour, raiseth my soul into an extacy, the least hint of hope is worth a world. But will God be pacified towards me? Is not this too good news to be true? Have I any warrant from God for this hope? O yes, I read in the scriptures of truth, abundance of gracious promises, upon which I will venture my soul's everlasting state, and while I have a word of promise from heaven to secure God's favour and pardon to a penitent sinner, I cannot, I must not consider it presumption to entertain hope. The promises are these, Isa. lv. 7, 8. Jer. xxxi. 34. Isa. xliii. 25. xlv. 22. Psal. xxv. 11. Luke xxiv. 46, 47. Matt. xi. 28. Acts x. 43. xiii. 38, 39. Rom. iv. 5—7. Titus iii. 5.—

2. I proceed to another class of persons and seasons wherein God's children feel the truth of this text, "That in God's favour is life;" and that is returning

* Zeph. ii. 3. Amos v. 15. Joel ii. 14. Jonah iii. 9.

† 1 Tim. i. 15, 16.

‡ Dan. ix. 8, 9.

backsliders, when the souls of God's children have fallen into acts of open scandalous sinning, or a secret course of remissness, unwatchfulness, and decays of grace; in such a day God usually hides his face from the soul, and leaves it in a woful plight, under a measure of desertion, and alas the soul is now under a convincing sense of the importance of God's favour in four respects:—

(1.) The poor backsliding soul wants and longs for a gracious reception into God's favour again. Ah! saith the poor humbled penitent, my case is sad and desperate; when I first entered into covenant with God, I promised constancy, I said, "Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord, in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten;"* but alas, how soon have I forgotten it! how soon have I forsaken the Lord! how quickly am I turned aside after vain things that cannot profit! woe is me, ungrateful wretch that I am! my unkind dealing with God is unparalleled! who ever returned unto folly as I have done? O my wanderings from God! my guilty conscience accuseth me, God frowns on me, all my former sins stare me in the face, even the sins of my unregeneracy; I may even question, whether ever there was a saving change, for did ever any of God's children go on at this rate? surely my spot is not their spot? May not such a backslider in heart and life expect to be filled with his own ways? Am I not bordering upon the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost? Seeing I have been once enlightened, and now fallen away at this rate, is it possible that ever I should be renewed again to repentance? may I not rather fearfully look for fiery indignation,† than a gracious acceptance into favour? yet, if my sin have not reached to that degree, of this I am sure, it hath been

* Jer. l. 5.

† Heb. vi. 4. x. 27.

fearfully aggravated by light and love received, by frequent relapses, striving of the Spirit, and conscience resisted and stifled, which makes my very heart ache, and fills my face with shame and blushing, so that I am not able to look up; I have no ground to expect God's favour, as I cannot expect such favour from men; but what saith God? I will study and plead these encouraging texts, Jer. xxxi. 12, 14. Hos. xi. 7—9. xiv. 4.

(2.) The backsliding soul wants God's favour for reviving the dying graces of the spiritual life. Alas! saith the Christian, by my carelessness or sinning I have not only lost God's favour, but have defaced his image in my soul, I feel sensible decays of grace, my faith flags, my love cools, my repentance is arrested, all the springs seem to be dried up, or the streams run faintly, the fire of grace is buried under the ashes of sloth or corruption, and I would fain have stirred up the gift of God in me, but I cannot, I see it will not be, all my rubbing will not fetch heat into my benumbed joints, my heart is smitten and withered as grass,* nothing but a shower of God's grace, and the sunshine of his countenance can again renew the face of my soul. In the spring I see the Lord alone renew the face of the earth;† O that he would renew his work in my heart, and cause the fruits of righteousness again to bud forth. By idleness of the hands the house droppeth through, by my carelessness and sloth I have made wounds in my conscience, and by the same opening by which sin hath come in, grace hath gone out, and now God's wrath drops into my heart, and follows me. O that God would again recruit his own work in my heart, which is almost dwindled away to nothing! O that his Spirit would restore my decaying graces, and

* Psal. cii. 4.

† Psal. civ. 30.

revive my drooping heart ! Do, O Lord, according to thy word, and remember for me these quickening promises, Hos. vi. 3. xiv. 6—8. Isa. xxxv. 1—4. xliv. 3, 4.

(3.) The troubled backslider wants peace and comfort. O, saith he, for a sense of God's favour again; alas, this I have lost, my soul is far off from peace, I forget prosperity,* yea, for peace I have great bitterness, and when comfort is offered, my soul refuseth to be comforted. I even remember God, and am troubled, reflecting what joys I have had, which are now lost, and questioning my interest in him; will the Lord cast off for ever? will he be favourable no more?† O what a long while it is since I saw his blessed face! his visits are grown very rare, there is a great and sad strangeness between God and my soul. Alas, what shall I do to recover his smiles? I am sensible now and then of his quickening presence, but his comforting presence is utterly gone; I must justify God, and condemn myself; though he should banish me from his blessed presence for ever, yet is there not hope in Israel concerning this thing? May I believe that God will return? O it would be delightful to behold the light of his countenance! to feel those joys that once I had, but now have lost! O that it were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me! when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness!‡ Lord, restore unto me the joy of thy salvation,|| hide not thy face from me. "Lord, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me?"§ what would my soul give for one of thy wonted smiles? shall I never regain the sense of thy favour? wilt thou suffer thy

* Lam. iii. 17.

† Psal. lxxvii. 2—10.

‡ Job xxix. 2, 3.

|| Psal. li. 12.

§ Psal. lxxxviii. 14.

child to pine away in disconsolateness for want of his Father's love? O that I might again lie in that blessed bosom! how well shall it be with me upon my return to my first husband!* Lord, remember these words of promise to thy servant, on which thou hast caused me to trust; Isa. lvii. 16—19. liv. 6—8, 13. xxxii. 16, 17. lxvi. 12—14. 2 Cor. vii. 6.

(4.) All this will not fully content the returning backslider, without God's favour to secure him from falling for time to come. Alas, saith the restored wanderer, I have a backsliding heart, and though I be brought back now, I shall again go astray, without new supplies of assisting grace: I feel my heart declining, and it will return unto folly after peace spoken,† unless God speak an effecting as well as commanding word,—"Go thy way and sin no more." God's special favour must maintain this work fresh in my heart: "Turn us again, and cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved, so will not we go back from thee. Quicken us, and we will call upon thy name."—Psalm lxxx. 3, 7, 18, 19. Lord, unless the Sun of Righteousness keep still shining on me, and elevating me, I shall fall to the earth like a mere vapour or exhalation; if thy favour put not thy right hand under me, I fall and break my bones, dishonour thy name, undo my soul, and never recover. Fain would I hold out, O suffer me not to fall or fail; crown thy grace in me with perseverance, for suffering and perseverance must be the bottom and top of all graces, or they are counterfeit; I have many enemies within and without, I discern how apt I am to fall upon a very slight occasion, I have had too long experience of this treacherous spirit, and I dare not trust it, but I dare trust thee to keep that which concerns thee in me.‡ Establish me, strengthen and set-

* Hos. ii. 7.

† Psalm lxxxv. 8.

‡ Psalm cxxxviii. 8.

tle my soul : * thou hast by thy favour set my feet on the Rock that is higher than I, O keep me there, my mountain may soon be removed, but maintain me upon thy mountain, till I come to the mount of God. If God be my defence, I shall not be greatly moved, yea, I shall get strength that I shall not be moved at all. † I beg no more than what I have under thy hand in a promise : Psalm i. 3. xxxvii. 23, 24. cxii. 6, 7. Isaiah xli. 17. liv. 10. Jer. xxxii. 38—40. Hos. ii. 19, 20. Phil. i. 6.

3. Another season in which God's favour is valued by his people as life, is, when they are under some pressing, harassing affliction; then they feel a necessity of God's favour. Now these afflictions are of two sorts : first, outward ; secondly, inward. A hint of both.

(1.) In outward troubles relative to temporal circumstances, God's favour is precious as life itself. Suppose a Christian be poor, and hath little or nothing to betake himself to, even then he may make a shift to live upon God's favour : as the good woman said, "I have many a time made a good meal of a promise, when I have not had a morsel of meat in the house." And indeed the godly poor have a double advantage : first, to live by faith ; secondly, to enjoy God's peculiar patronage, Psalm cxl. 12. Prov. xxii. 22, 23. We use to say, he is rich, whom God loves ; and it is true, for our livelihood consists in God's favour—a little will go far when we have God's favour with it. A saint is not content merely to have God's leave to use the creatures, but his love therewith. Lord, saith the soul, I have little in the world, but let me have thee, thy grace in my heart, thy blessing with what I have, and I have more than worldly rich men ; though I be poor in the world, let me be heir of thy kingdom. ‡ So,

* 1 Pet. v. 10.

† Psalm lxii. 6.

‡ James ii. 5.

(2.) In the troubles that affect our good name: the poor soul saith, Alas, I see I have lost the favour of men, they reproach me, they are a terror to me, but be not thou, O Lord, a terror to me, thou art my only hope; men set themselves against me, be thou for me, then may I bid defiance to all the world; thy approbation is a sufficient fence against all men's censures.* Let men report what they will of me, let me have a good report of the truth, and I shall less matter men's verdict; but if I be reproached for Christ, I look upon that as a singular favour from God, and honour to me: the reproach of Christ is my riches.—Heb. xi. 26. 1 Pet. iv. 14. Acts v. 41. Isa. li. 7, 12, 13.

(3.) In bodily pains. When the Christian lies sick, or pained upon his bed, among all the visiters that manifest favour to him, he would have the Lord's company, and the Lord doth condescend to come to him, and not only visit him and speak to him, but puts his arm under him, and strengthens him upon his bed of languishing, yea, he tarries with him, and morning and evening makes his bed for him, Psalm xli. 3. O happy favourite of heaven that is thus attended! such a person knows, that if God sees good, he will favour him with removal from his bed, and his love bring him out of the pit, Isa. xxxviii. 17.

(4.) In relative troubles. Alas, saith the Christian, my relations are not only poor, but profane, yea, the greatest enemies I have in my religious course, and that Scripture is fulfilled, "A man's enemies are the men of his own house;" in this case, "I will look unto the Lord," Mic. vii. 5—7. I am content to venture to lose, and even actually to lose, the favour of brother, sister, father, mother, to gain and maintain the favour of God, and when all is gone I do not repent the bargain, I

* Jer. xvii. 17, 18. xx. 10—12.

have made a saving resolution, I am an infinite gainer. But how sad will it be to lose men's favour for appearing religious, and not being so? If you ask for what end, and upon what account, a Christian would have the sense of God's favour? I might shew this largely, by proving that affliction would be sweetened, coming to him as a token of special love from God as his Friend and Father; though it be a bitter pill, yet if it be sweetened with God's favour, the Christian's stomach will not rise against it, but take it cheerfully; if God send it in favour, he tastes honey upon the rod; the best fruit grows upon this tree. A father will correct his children in love, therefore in wisdom, in pity, in due measure, for a short season, for their good to take away sin, and fit them for heaven; therefore the rod is adopted to be as a genuine offspring of the covenant of God's grace, Psalm lxxxix. 32, 33. O, saith the soul, if I can but see God's heart towards me when his hand is on me, I am very well satisfied; let him wound me, so it be a wound of a friend; let him cut me, so he will cure me; let him do what he pleaseth with me, so he will but discover favour to me: and all this God promiseth.—Heb. xii. 8—10. Isa. xxvii. 8, 9. Jer. xlvi. 28. Prov. iii. 12. Isa. lxiii. 9. Zech. xiii. 9. Rom. v. 3—5.

Secondly, So for spiritual troubles which arise,

(1.) From the guilt of sin. O, saith the soul, what shall I do? whithersoever I go my sin always is before me, sin is upon me; ah, what can a guilty malefactor desire, but the Judge's favour? this God promiseth, and Christ purchaseth, as has been shown: see also, Exod. xxxiv. 6—8. Job xxxiii. 26—28. Mic. vii. 18.

(2.) From God's displeasure; in this case, when the poor soul feels God's anger, the only remedy is God's favour. O that God would remove from me the stroke

of his hand, Psalm xxxix. 10. Lord, rebuke me not in anger, I cannot bear thy displeasure, it is a death to me, but in thy favour is life.

(3.) The corruptions of the heart are a heavy affliction to a pious man, and make him bow down heavily, crying out with Paul, "Oh wretched man that I am!" these sons of Zeruiah are too hard for me, these Canaanites are thorns in my eyes, these mother's children put me to hard servitude, and what is the remedy? nothing but God's favour to mortify corruption, according to the promise of his word, Rom. vi. 14, "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace." O, saith the soul, that the Lord would come with succour and relief to my crying, bleeding heart, and rescue me from these intestine foes; what a favour should I look upon it!

(4.) The temptations of Satan cost the troubled heart many throes and pangs, that are ready to overpower it and lead it captive. When shall it once be, saith the Christian, that the God of grace will tread Satan under my feet? Rom. xvi. 20. Many a time my soul prays against these messengers of Satan:* O that at last his grace might be sufficient for me to vanquish them, or to maintain the conflict:† Lord, I beg thy favour against the roaring lion, he terrifies me, do thou interpose powerfully, or at least fortify me against these his fiery darts: gracious Lord Jesus, thou wast tempted to be able or qualified to succour such as were tempted,‡ thou seest how I am hurried and harassed, Lord, thy favour only will set me at liberty.

4. The last description of persons to whom God's favour is life, are dying persons; at the approach of the king of terrors, when flesh and heart fail, then it is time for the believer to look after God as the strength

* 2 Cor. xii. 7—9.

† 1 Cor. x. 13.

‡ Heb. ii. 18.

of his heart, and his portion for ever. * It is true, he hath chosen God's favour before, but now he feels it more sensibly to be his life in these four respects:—

(1.) To satisfy him respecting the safety of his state. The poor Christian hath been often doubting and disputing his interest in Christ and title to heaven, but now he cries out, Alas! what shall I say or do? my soul is in a dangerous state, I am passing into another world, and I know not whither; I am at great uncertainties about eternity, it is a great journey, the matter is of infinite concernment, heaven or hell, salvation or damnation depends upon it; the guilt of many sins comes fresh into my remembrance, I am doubtful of the genuineness of my repentance, my heart is very deceitful, the work is difficult, there are many mistakes, it is easy to miscarry, thousands are shipwrecked unawares. Shall I say with that dying emperor,† Oh my poor wandering, trembling, fluttering soul, whither art thou going? thou must converse no more with men, nor jest it out as thou wast wont: oh, whither art thou going? Or shall I say with another, I have lived anxiously, and die doubtfully.‡ Alas, I am afraid to go out of the world, not knowing whether God be my friend or my enemy; oh for a sense of reconciliation! Now the fruits of God's favour to my soul would be worth all the world; if God would smile upon my soul in Christ, I should not be ashamed to live, because I have a good conscience, nor afraid to die, because I have a good God to go to. Let me have faith, that I may die in the faith; || let me live in the Lord, that I may die in the Lord,§ so I shall be happy

* Psalm lxxiii. 26.

† *Animula vagula, blandula, qui nunc abibis in loca, &c.*

‡ *Anxius vixi, dubius morior.*

|| Heb. xi. 13.

§ Rev. xiv. 13.

with the Lord for ever. One smile, O Lord, vouchsafe to me, a cluster of the grapes of Canaan, a foretaste of heaven before I go hence, for I cannot live, and I dare not die without thy favour and the sense of it.

(2.) To take away the sting and fear of death. God's favour and the sense of it will alone remove fears from the soul, going to conflict with the king of terrors. Death is indeed terrible in itself, and often presents itself in a formidable shape, and when it looks so ghastly, the poor Christian is affrighted, unless the Lord look cheerfully upon him. Now he thus expresseth himself: Lord, sin brought death into the world, his voracious jaws swallow up all mankind, and I am going the way of all the earth, I see his pale face, I feel his fangs fastening on me, the graves are ready for me, but God's smiles will dismay death, and put this tyrant out of countenance, God's favour will remove obscurity from my eyes, and open for me a prospect into eternity; and O how happy is it to look above the grave to God, and beyond death at heaven! My Lord Jesus tasted death, and thereby conquered death, and wrested its destructive weapons out of its hands, destroying him that had the power of death which is the devil; and so delivering them, who through fear of death, were all their life time subject to bondage;* hence the christian champion under a sense of God's favour and Christ's conquest may triumph over death, and say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"† O that my soul could see my Saviour laid before me in the grave, perfuming it for me, preparing me for it, bidding me follow him who broke the ice, and drunk of the brook in the way, surely I would then follow my Captain without fear, I should shoot this gulf without danger, and say with David, "Though

* Heb. ii. 14, 15.

† 1 Cor. xv. 55, 56.

I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." Psal. xxiii. 4.

(3.) To receive the soul immediately upon dissolution; this must be by God's favour, for the soul cannot enter into heaven without God's leave and approbation; they must be special favourites that are admitted into his presence chamber. It is true we cannot expect that peculiar privilege, which the good thief upon the cross had, to whom Christ said, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise."* That audible encouragement was a peculiar dispensation, yet God speaks satisfactorily in scripture promises, and the soul's faith therein may produce that blessed result, Psal. xlix. 15, "God shall redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for he shall receive me," that is, receive me by his special favour into safety. O with what comfort might I look through death, when I see the crown in my Saviour's hand ready to be set upon my head as a conqueror, when the blessed Jesus will put the palms of victory into my hand, and place my immortal soul among the spirits of just men made perfect, with what confidence may I commend my soul into his hands, and trust him that he will keep that which I have committed to him until that day.† Lord, now shine upon this soul of mine that is taking its long leave of the body, send a guard of angels to be its convoy through the devil's territories into the heaven of heavens, and lay it soft and secure in Abraham's bosom.‡ The rich man's pompous funeral is an insignificant ceremony compared with this transportation; let what will become of my body, if only my soul be safely lodged with God; then would I desire to be dissolved, that I might be with Christ; then would my soul take the wings of a dove,

* Luke xxiii. 43. † Psal. xxxi. 5. 2 Tim. i. 12. ‡ Luke xvi. 22.

and fly away above the reach of hellish fiends,* or raging lusts; Lord, grant me thy favour.

(4.) The expiring Christian wants the sense of God's special favour, that he may lie down in hopes of a blessed resurrection. When the soul, the better part, is thus secured, he then takes thought for the case, the body; this goodly fabric must be taken down, I must be unclothed; this frail, tender piece is now dissolving, must be turned to dust and rottenness, and shall be a companion to worms and corruption; well, I am content, but let my soul have a sense of God's favour, and I may be well assured my body shall sleep in Jesus, as redeemed dust which shall be gathered up at the last day; and O what a blessed meeting shall there be of soul and body! what a lovely reuniting of this glorious pair, the soul descending with its triumphant Lord in the air, where Satan shall be dispossessed of his regency, and the body raised up out of the grave by the power of Christ's resurrection, both for ever to be with the Lord;† O blessed day, soul and body married together, never to part more, both solemnly married to the Lord. Here our souls are espoused, there presented to Christ as chaste virgins;‡ O happy soul, O resplendent body, which shall shine forth in glory, activity, spirituality, brilliance, and immortality,|| there my body shall need neither food nor physic, nor sleep, nor marriage, but I shall be as one of the angels of God;§ this mean, diseased, distressed body of mine shall be wonderfully changed, that it may be fashioned like to the glorious body of my Lord Jesus;¶ then shall I be set upon a throne among the blessed, to judge degenerate Israel, yea, to judge angels.** O for that

* Phil. i. 21. Psal. lv. 6.

† 1 Thess. iv. 16, 17.

‡ 2 Cor. xi. 2.

|| 1 Cor. xv. 42—44.

§ Matt. xxii. 30.

¶ Phil. iii. 21.

** Matt. xix. 28.

1 Cor. vi. 3.

day, that blessed day of refreshment that comes from the presence of the Lord,* what then will it be worth to have the favour of the Judge? no matter then who be friends, or who enemies, if I may have Christ on my side, blessed be God I have now a friend in the court, Jesus Christ my Saviour, my advocate, he it is that then shall be Judge, who will own his members, and not forget his brethren, but will proclaim that joyful welcome into his Father's kingdom, "Come ye blessed of my Father,"† come up hither, and sit with me in my throne, even as I overcame and sat with my Father in his throne,‡ welcome my dear saints, ye have been faithful to death, I will also give you a crown of life; you owned me on earth, I will also own you in heaven; you chose my favour above the world, you shall have my favour, and not the world; you shall be placed on my right hand, but others on my left; you were once in favour with me, and you are now in favour, and shall continue so for ever; come into my everlasting embraces, this is the state I purchased for you, promised to you, these are the mansions I went before to prepare for you, || this is the kingdom which I told you, it was your Father's good pleasure to give unto you, it is God's gift,§ not your desert, it is the fruit of God's favour, not your labour. I know it, Lord, I know it, saith the soul, this could not be from my earning, for it is by grace and mere favour that I am what I am, and what can such a one deserve; therefore am I now seeking thy favour, now at the last struggle, that I may lie down in my grave in peace, sleep in the dust as on a bed of spices, and rise with thy saints into glory. ¶ In the mean time being fortified with thy favour, I can bid adieu to this weary

* Acts iii. 19.

† Matt. xxv. 34.

‡ Rev. iii. 21.

|| John. xiv. 2.

§ Luke xii. 32. Rom. vi. 23.

¶ Isa. lvii. 2.

world, welcome death, hope for life, and therefore my heart is glad, my glory rejoiceth, my flesh also shall rest in hope,* “For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though, after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another: though my reins be consumed within me.” Job xix. 25—27.

CHAP. V.

OF WHAT NATURE THAT LIFE IS WHICH PROCEEDS FROM THE FAVOUR OF GOD.

THERE is one thing more in the doctrinal part of this subject, of which I shall briefly speak, before I proceed to the application, which is, the reason why a Christian's life is in God's favour: to illustrate and confirm this point, I may shew,

First, What life proceeds from God's favour.

Secondly, Why saints esteem God's favour to be their life.

First, What is the nature of that life which is in God's favour? Besides what was spoken in explication of a natural, comfortable, and spiritually joyful life, all which depend on God's favour; I shall more particularly open a fourfold life of the Christian, which is contained in, and flows from the favour of God, namely,

A life of justification, sanctification, covenant supplies, and glory.

* Psal. xvi. 9, 10.

1. Of justification; a justified state is life. As a man condemned is dead legally, so pardon brings him a new life in a legal sense; thus the just shall live by faith, Rom. i. 17, that is, by applying the righteousness of Christ to sinners by faith, for their justification, which is the gospel way of justification: now this work is of grace and favour, not of debt, Rom. iv. 4. Mere favour that God would appoint and accept satisfaction from the surety, and not demand full payment from the debtor; so that "to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness," Rom. iv. 5. This is the stupendous contrivance of free grace; poor sinners that cannot pay a farthing in order to satisfy justice, yet are reckoned clear upon accepting Christ by faith, and that faith also a free gift, a fruit of covenant grace; here is favour upon favour, favour without witness. Surely, a poor arrested debtor accounts it a great favour, if a friend will be bound for him, much more if he pay the whole debt, most of all, if he furnish him with means to perform the conditions; God hath done all this for believers. O what astonishing mercy is this! what an admirable contrivance of grace! God just still, the law in force still, sin hateful, the poor soul sinning, and can do nothing to satisfy, yet accepted as righteous in God's sight, as if he had fully answered the demands of the law. This is the proper result produced by infinite grace and wisdom.

2. A life of sanctification originates in divine favour. This in scripture is called life also, Gal. ii. 20, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me," by his image, and his Spirit working in my heart, bringing forth vital acts, eternal life within, and a spiritual grace without, in holy performances and new obedience; all this is from covenant love, and favour as scripture assures

us,* God's favour is the proper cause of the being of grace, "it gives grace and renders souls acceptable."† Grace were not grace, if not freely given. Paul saith, "By the grace of God I am what I am," 1 Cor. xv. 10. It is God's favour that draws out the habits of grace into exercise; "For," saith our Saviour, "without me you can do nothing, John xv. 5, and "it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do," Phil. ii. 13. All that spring of grace in the heart, and those rivers of living waters which flow from believers, proceed from covenant favour, John vii. 38. The very God of peace must sanctify wholly, and he alone fills with fruits of righteousness, he gives progress in sanctification, power to perform religious duties, and fresh assistance for new undertakings.‡ Let none say we deny holiness, because we exclude it a place in a sinner's justification, for these are inseparable companions; we allow it the place which scripture assigns it, though we dare not put it into the room of Christ's blood, it is certain where Christ is a Saviour he will be a sovereign, his benefits and his person cannot be divided, the virtue of his death and resurrection, goes along with their value; newness of life and heart is as necessary in its place, as freedom from wrath and condemnation. Now Christ is made sanctification as well as righteousness;|| and no question but a sincere saint pursues after holiness, and blesseth God for knocking off his fetters, as well as paying his debts. Though a prisoner be set at liberty, yet he is not satisfied, unless he have his mortal disease healed. Spiritual health and strength of soul to serve God are unspeakable favours, as well as deliverance from guilt and wrath; God is the author,

* Jer. xxxi. 33. Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.

† Gratia gratiam dans, et gratiam faciens.

‡ 1 Thess. v. 23. Col. i. 10. || Rom. viii. 1, 2. 1 Cor. i. 30.

and Christ the purchaser, while a believing soul is the possessor of both.

3. A life of covenant supply is from God's favour. God's blessing makes our comforts effectual to attain the end designed in their use ; for "man lives not by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord."—Deut. viii. 3. Alas, how can dead things preserve life in us ? God's blessing is the staff of our bread, the support of our lives, and the ground of all our hopes ; what have we to depend upon but this ? But that which we mean here is covenant supply, by virtue of a promise, and when all things come as tokens of God's favour. Phil. iv. 19, "My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." O blessed word !

(1.) "My God."

(2.) "Riches in glory," or glorious riches.

(3.) "By Christ Jesus."

No wonder now if wants be supplied, all wants of soul and body, and that in a covenant way. It is an admirable text, hath much marrow in it, which an active faith will fetch out. The word of God is full of expressions to this purpose, that there is no want to them that fear him, and that God gives the desire of the saint's heart.* Nor do these come as common mercies, but as tokens of special favour ; hence Jer. xxxii. 41, "Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart, and with my whole soul." Here is favour with favour. Sometimes God gives gifts, that may in a sort be called giftless, when he gives not himself or his special love, so he gave Israel quails in wrath ;† for it is one thing for God to give a mercy,

* Psal. xxxiv. 9, 10. xxxvii. 3, 4, 11, 22, 26. lxxxiv. 11, 12. cxxviii. 1, 2. cxxxi. 15. Matt. vi. 33. † Psal. lxxviii. 29, 31.

and another to give in mercy ; but a child of God hath his mercies in mercy, as tokens and testimonies of special favour, which adds an accent and emphasis to every mercy, and makes it come doubly laden with peculiar interest ; shall I call it double guilt ? Nay, it is gold throughout as Xenophon relates of Cyrus's gifts, he gave a cup of gold to Artabanus, and a kiss to Chrysantas, the former complained that his cup was not such good gold as the other's kiss, because the latter was a sign of special favour. So truly, God's favour to his people hath more real worth in it, than wicked men's golden comforts which are but gilded outsides of empty boxes, but every comfort a Christian hath is full charged with blessing, and whatever it be in point of quantity, yet in point of quality it is like Benjamin's mess, five times larger than the men of the world's.

4. A life of glory and salvation doth proceed from God's favour : John x. 28, " I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish." So that this eternal life in heaven, which only deserves the name of life, is God's special gift, the gift of his favour and peculiar love, Rom. vi. 23. God freely gave Christ, Christ freely gave himself for us, and accordingly God gives eternal life to all his members. * It was dear to Christ, but free to us ; the manner of God's procuring it for us, and conveying it to us, is something wonderful indeed, yet doth not lessen, but rather augments the favour, as so much must be done and suffered, which makes it so costly a thing to bring our souls to heaven. Well may we write this word *favour* in capital letters upon all the steps we take towards glory, and upon every link of that golden chain that draws us from earth to

* John iii. 16. Heb. ix. 15. 2 Tim. i. 10. 1 Pet. i. 3, 4. Tit. iii. 7. 1 John iii. 1, 2.

heaven, from the dungeon of our natural state into the paradise of God's immediate presence. "Thou wilt guide me by thy counsel," saith David, "and afterwards receive me to glory."—Psalm lxxiii. 23, 24. "Fear not little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."—Luke xii. 32. If ever we come to heaven, we must be carried thither in the bosom of God's distinguishing favour; no man that ever entered those pearly gates could say, I have paid a valuable price for this heavenly city. It is an inheritance which comes by favour, not by purchase. Let the proud Papist say, I will not have heaven at free cost, * we, for our parts, must with the four and twenty elders cast down our crowns before the throne, saying, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power."—Rev. iv. 10, 11. v. 12.

Secondly, A word or two may be advanced in answer to the inquiry, Why Christians esteem God's favour to be their life? I shall not need to enlarge here. It may be so,

1. Because they have enlightened minds to see the difference betwixt God and the creature. There is such an excellency in God, and such vanity in the creature, that they must needs think highly of God, and lowly of the world; God is the chief good, others are inferior good, inconsiderable, or false and flattering: a Christian through grace is able to judge of things aright, and as they are. The difference betwixt a pious man's judging, and a sinner's, Dr. Ames sets forth thus: "An infant is much affected with a picture or image of meat and drink, or an apple, or any thing desirable, but a wise man knows how to distinguish betwixt the mere picture and the substance, especially having tasted the goodness of those things." Thus the believing Christian

* *Cœlum gratis non accipiam.*

hath tasted that the Lord is gracious,* and hence longs for more of him, and this is that whereby he lives, so that it is death to be without God or his grace.

2. Because the gracious soul hath a sanctified will and affections. These are changed from what they were originally by nature; the heart by nature savoureth not the things that be of God, but those that be of men;† but a sincere Christian is born from above, and hath a noble principle, a heaven-born soul. Those heavenly courtiers in the palace above, the holy angels and glorified saints, take little notice of crowns, sceptres, mitres, or treasures; one smile of God's face is of more worth than all the monarchies, glittering pageantries, or honours of the earth. So the saints' hearts are transformed into their likeness, have the same grace for quality, though not for quantity, with the saints in heaven, and have the like thoughts (so far as spiritualized) with those above, for they are clothed with the sun, and have the moon under their feet.—Rev. xii. 1.

3. Because the true Christian hath felt the bitterness of sin, and God's displeasure for it, and the impossibility of other things quieting his conscience, without God's favour. A poor guilty malefactor at the bar may have many persuasives to put off his grief, but nothing will tranquilize him, when condemned, but his prince's favour and pardon: just thus it is with the converted sinner, that was lost in himself, and lay under the curse of the law, ‡ dead in himself, || and perceiving that nothing could compose his spirit, and quiet his heart but God's favour in Christ. Tell the guilty conscience of honours, pleasures, or treasures of the world, you sing songs to a heavy heart; these things make the Christian more sad, rather than still

* 1 Peter ii. 3. † Matt. xvi. 23. ‡ Gal. iii. 10. || Rom. vii. 9.

the clamours of conscience : no, no, nothing will serve but God's favour.

4. Because the sincere Christian is a genuine believer, he views things with the eye of faith ; with Paul's perspective, 2 Cor. iv. 18 ; like Moses, Heb. xi. 26, 27. The eye of faith can throw obscurity upon all the world's glory, and lay its honours in the dust : it can draw a veil over the world's painted face, and withdraw the world's veil from before heavenly objects, and represent them in their native lustre. Faith can realize the things of God, and set them off with some advantage to sense : it can overlook present objects, and obtain a view of God's countenance. Faith can take the dimensions of heavenly and earthly things, and engage the soul to a proportionable valuation. A Christian's life is a life of faith, we walk by faith, not by sense : faith quickly discerns how little sense, or objects of sense can help him in straits ; the hope of heavenly things springing from God's favour, must bring him relief, and cheer his drooping spirits : faith fetcheth all down from God to the soul, and accordingly begets a high valuation of his favour as the only source of life. Thus much for the doctrinal part.

CHAP. VI.

INFORMATION DERIVED FROM THE SUBJECT UNDER CONSIDERATION.

THE subsequent particulars may be detailed as conveying information :—

1. It follows that life is a rich mercy. Why so ?

Because it is the proper result of God's favour, "in his favour is life." It is also that good which David takes and makes use of to illustrate and exemplify God's favour: he doth not say in God's favour is wisdom, learning, riches, health or relations, though these are mercies, yet they are but such as are produced under God by the tree of life. Natural life is a foundation-mercy; if life be gone, all the comforts of life cease: hence nature desires a perpetuating of its being, and abhors a dissolution. The devil was orthodox in the doctrine, though perverting it in the use; Job ii. 4, "Skin for skin, all that a man hath will he give for his life." Divines dispute whether a miserable being, or no being be better? It is true, no being is better than a being in misery, in respect of the individual person: hence Christ said of Judas, "It had been better he had never been born:"* but yet in respect of the whole creation, of which this miserable being is a part and branch, and in respect of God's will and glory, such a miserable being is better than none at all; it is a favour from God that we have any being with any mercy attached to it, and we should praise God while he continues it, Psalm civ. 33. A wretched being in the lowest rank of God's creatures, is a favour God doth not owe us, and we owe him praise and service for it.

2. That outward comforts of life are fruits of God's favour. If God's favour is life, it is also our livelihood, it is of the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed, and it is also rich favour that his mercies are new every morning,† even every moment; God's favour is the life of our mercies, and the mercy of our lives; our outward comforts depend on divine pleasure, and God's special favour. When David was blessing God for his

* Mark xiv. 21.

† Lam. iii. 22, 23.

mercies, he saith, Psalm cili. 4, "Who redeemeth thy life from destruction," there is the mercy of life; "who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies," there is favour imparting the supplies of life. And indeed we do not use to make our acknowledgments and express our obligation to the hand that gives, but the mind that inclines the hand to bestow the gift; the favour and good will of the giver is the spring of the benefit: all our supplies come of mere favour, godly and wicked have forfeited them into the hands of justice: Jacob acknowledged he was not worthy of the least of God's mercies,* so may we say; one sin forfeits temporal enjoyments, bless God for their undeserved continuance.

3. It follows, that wicked men have many fruits of God's favour, and we must still distinguish betwixt God's common and his special favour. As to the latter, no man knows either love or hatred by what is before him, for all things come alike to all, Eccles. ix. 1, 2. Riches of themselves do not evidence God's peculiar favour; for both Scripture and experience testify, that the worst of men oftentimes have the greatest share of the best things of this world. By what tenure they possess these things, I shall not dispute, or whether they be properly usurpers of God's creatures; as to true covenant title in Christ they have none, but a right before men they have, and some right in God's sight as from his royal bounty: as thus, suppose a malefactor is condemned to die, the sentence is not executed, in the interval before the execution, he hath bread and water, or something still more nourishing given him to keep him alive till the execution, he hath broken the law, and forfeited his life and livelihood, yet it is the king's pleasure and favour he shall be main-

* Gen. xxxii. 10.

tained, he is no usurper in using that meat ; thus God endureth with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction. *

4. The last inference is this, that God's favour is infinitely better than all worldly enjoyments. There were endless disputes amongst heathen philosophers, to decide wherein consisteth man's chief good ? this text determines the controversy, the chief good of man consists in the favour of God. It seems this was the great inquiry, and a subject of eager investigation in the days of David ; Psalm iv. 6, 7, " There be many that say, who will shew us any good ? " Let David answer the question, he will clearly transfer it from the creature to the Creator : " Who will shew ? " they meant, who among men ? but God alone must answer David's diligent inquiry, let him have a propitious smile from heaven, and he is satisfied ; let others make their best of the world's markets, David looks for his profit from another mart and quarter : God's shining countenance is better to him, than their plentiful harvests of corn and wine, and no wonder if we compare a little, worldly enjoyments with God's favour.

(1.) God's favour is the spring and fountain, the original cause of all favours ; and surely, the cause hath more in it than the effect. God's favour is abundant and plentiful ; hence it is called, " The fountain of living waters." † It is true, the streams of God's favour do run through God's covenant people as their proper channel, yet many rich drops sprinkle over mountains of Gilboa, and the heath of the wilderness ; but these are only drops, crumbs cast to dogs, or showers of outward mercies at the best, while saints lie at the spring-head of grace.

(2.) God's favour alone satisfies a rational soul,

* Rom. ix. 22.

† Jer. ii. 13.

other things cannot; this only brings solid peace and quietness to our minds, and satisfaction to our desires.* God made the soul for himself and it cannot be at rest till it return to God ; Psal. cxvi. 7. Other things are bread which fills not, nay, no bread at all, but he that obtains divine favour may eat that which is good, and his soul shall delight itself in fatness ; Isa. lv. 2. As a natural body out of its place is not at rest, so the soul must enjoy God ; as no quantity of any thing can fill a vessel when its capacity is larger than that quantity, so no earthly thing can fill a heavenly soul, for the soul is more capacious than the world.

(3.) God's favour is spiritual, therefore can extend to souls and spirits, which carnal corporeal objects cannot do, they adhere to the outside, to the members and senses. Hence said that rich man, "Soul, take thine ease, thou hast goods laid up." But what were those goods to his soul ? it was his sensitive, not his rational soul that was the better by them ; there is no proportion betwixt outward things and spiritual faculties, but God's favour in Christ is adequate and suitable to the soul, it can pierce and penetrate through all the senses to the inward man, and there unite itself by intimate conjunction with our minds, for it doth not lightly tickle the outward or inward senses, but even possesseth the soul and spirit. One compares the joy of God's favour to an abundant drenching of the earth with seasonable rain, while favour from the world, resembles a light sprinkling of the earth with an evening dew ; God's favour waters thoroughly, the world's drops are but like the sprinkling of water on the smith's fire, making it burn hotter.

(4.) God's favour is to be desired for itself, as the ultimate object of our desires. Other things are only

* Psalm xxxvi. 8.

desirable for inferior ends in their secondary respective places, as physic to recover health, meat to satisfy hunger, &c. but there is no other end for which God can be rightly desired, except for himself, and all other things in subordination to this end, for all things must be referred to God, as the efficient cause and chief end of all; when a man is travelling, if he be arrested in any part of his way he cannot perfect his journey, or reach to the end thereof; but created things are intended as steps to conduct the Christian forward on his journey.

(5.) God's favour is independent, and needs not to be indebted to the creature, as a means to effect the end; it can satisfy souls immediately, and so indeed it doth those in heaven, for they have neither creature supplies, nor positive institutions, through which God's favour is communicated to them, his blissful presence is their heaven; so it is in this world, God can, and often doth refresh the hearts of his children in the absence of means, not only of creature comforts, but of his own ordinances; a Paul could feel enjoyment,* whether in the body, or out of the body, he could not tell; but however, as it was abstracted from the creature, so it was above the creature to effect.

(6.) God's favour is an infinite good, because it can, at one and the same time, supply all the creatures in heaven and earth, whose necessities are so various;† the sun can only give light to one hemisphere at once, but the sun of God's favour shines through the visible creation into men's souls, and to the saints and angels in heaven in a glorious radiant manner; these live more directly under the benign influences of God's bliss-mak-

* 2 Cor. xii. 2.

† Quod totum omnibus simul communicatum debet esse infinitum.—*Ames. Cat. Sec. 7.*

ing presence, yet we feel the virtue and comfort of it more reflexly through the glass of ordinances. I dispute not whether that which satisfies a soul must needs be infinite, since a soul is but finite ; but this is certain, that which satisfies all souls at once must be infinite.

(7.) God's favour is unmixed, pure, and perfect, there are no dregs in this cup, it is a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal ; Rev. xxii. 1. There is light and no darkness at all,* life and no death, blessing and no curse, fulness of joy and no sorrow,† heaven and no hell ; his blessing makes rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it as to outward comforts ; and for spiritual joys, so far as God's favour shines upon the soul, and is not obstructed and intercepted with the thick mists of sin, fear, or ignorance, there is no defect in it, no sadness attends it, but the spiritual Jews have light and gladness, and joy and honour,‡ while in worldly enjoyments there is not only vanity but vexation.

(8.) God's favour is effectual, it can cure the soul of all its fears, and sad thoughts, and scatter all clouds. Psalm xciv. 19, " In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul." Alas ! the top and cream of worldly joy from outward comforts is soon fleeted, or skimmed off by means of affliction ; when God emptieth from vessel to vessel, he spoils mirth, but his favour can elevate the heart from earth, yea, from hell to heaven ; it can make the Christian bear up against storms in the midst of the most furious encounters, yea, it causeth joy not only in them, but for them. ||

(9.) God's favour may be made sure, but the enjoyments of the world cannot ; all outward comforts are

* 1 John i. 5.

† Psal. xvi. 11.

‡ Esther viii. 16.

|| 2 Cor. xii. 10. James i. 2.

but as liquor in a brittle glass, soon cracked, soon lost. A great man once boasted of three things that he could not lose, his riches, his learning, and the king's favour; but in seeking a blessing on his meat he could not speak sense, he was forced to solicit charity, and before he died, professed, he was sure the king did care more for the worst of his dogs than for him. But God's favour is constant, permanent and everlasting; truth and mercy go hand in hand to all eternity. *

(10.) God's favour always ends well: it begins in good-will, it ends in good-will; it begins in benevolence, it ends in complacency; it begins in grace, it ends in glory; it is so far from ceasing, that it is increasing; it is like Solomon's sun that shines brighter to the perfect day of glory, like Ezekiel's waters that grow deeper till the soul arrive at the unfathomable depth of eternal felicity. But alas! the comforts of this world, if the soul have no interest in God's favour, like the sweet and clear streams of Jordan run down into the dead sea of never-ending, boundless misery.

CHAP. VIII.

TENDENCY OF WHAT HAS BEEN STATED TO PRODUCE CONVICTION.

IN making application of the subject for the purpose of producing conviction both with respect to sinners and saints, I commence with th former.

Is God's favour a Christian's life? Then, O what a fearful case are those in that are not in God's favour?

* Psalm c. 5.

Woe, woe, woe to that soul which is out of God's favour, and continues so, and is found so at death and judgment. O what a sad and deplorable state ! better, ten thousand times better never to have been born. How canst thou live, soul ? how darest thou die ? Who dost thou think will take pity on thee, if God disown thee ? How canst thou make a shift to keep up thy heart from terror ? How canst thou eat and drink, sleep or work, as long as thou art not sure thou art in God's favour ? Or if thou mindest not these things, but puttest off thoughts of soul affairs a while, how canst thou bear up thy head at the approach of death ? Dost thou dream of a reprieve or exemption from it ? or dost thou imagine thou must die like a beast, and so feel neither weal nor woe when life is gone ? or dost thou think to arrive at heaven without God's love or leave ? Canst thou be so sottish as to hope to be happy whether God will or not ? Is not life bound up in, and issuing from God's favour ? I may say to that soul that hath not an interest in God's favour, as the Lord to Abimelech, " Thou art but a dead man. *

1. Thou hast no true spiritual life, but art dead in sins and trespasses : † whatever vital acts thou pretendest to, thou hast no more spiritual life in thee than a dead carcass ; though thou mayest have a name to live, thou art dead, ‡ thou art but the picture of a Christian ; adorn a dead corpse, you cannot put life into it, but make it more offensive ; thy graces are but dead graces, thy duties are dead duties, thy gifts, comforts, and acts all are dead, and thy soul a dead soul, ready to be put into the grave of eternal perdition. How canst thou be otherwise than dead, when thou wantest the sun of God's favour to put life into thee ?

* Gen. xx. 3.

† Eph. ii. 1.

‡ Rev. iii. 1.

2. Thou art under the sentence of death which the law has passed upon thee, the gospel declares thee condemned already, thou hast forfeited thy right to all creature comforts, canst not truly call one morsel of bread thine own by a true covenant title, though God in his general bounty casts such crumbs to dogs: and for all thy bearing up so confidently with thy prayers, hearings, and hopings, all is abomination in his sight, nothing thou dost can please God, thou canst find no acceptance with him. Poor soul, thou toilest and trudgest hard to no purpose; if thou be not in favour with God, he will say, who required these things at thy hands? Alas, all thou art or doest is rejected.

3. Thou art every moment exposed to a natural death, thy life hangs in doubt, and depends upon the courtesy of an offended God, who hath thee in his power, and can strike thee dead any moment of thy life: if thou sawest a giant stand over thee with a drawn sword, being thy sworn enemy, and ready to take away thy life, thou wouldest take but little rest in thy bed; God is thine enemy, stronger than all the men on earth, and he is just and true, and hath bound himself by an oath to destroy all the workers of iniquity; he is angry with the wicked every day, if thou turn not, he will whet his sword, he hath bent his bow, and made it ready, he hath prepared for thee the instruments of death, Psalm vii. 11, 12. How canst thou sleep quietly? surely thy pillow is very soft, or thy heart very hard, else thou wouldest never be thus quiet under so much guilt, when thou knowest not that thou shalt live another hour, when thou canst not tell but death may meet thee at thy board, in thy bed, in the field, on the road; God hath the advantage of thee, and can soon hurl thee out of this world into another—a stamp of his foot, a word of his mouth, a

frown of his countenance will do it, for thou must perish at the rebuke of his countenance. How canst thou evade the arrest of his grim sergeant, death? the grave is ready for thee, yield thou must. And,

4. What is worst of all, when thou diest a natural death, thou enterest upon the bitter pangs of eternal death, which consists in a separation of the soul from God, and tormenting pains of soul and body under divine wrath.* Alas, soul! dost thou know what an everlasting banishment from the favourable presence of God means? this the hell of hell, and though here thou canst be content to live without God's favour, yet it will be another manner of thing to be in hell without the benefit of God's favour; here thou mayest be content, there the loss of it will be tormenting, then thine eyes will be opened to see what is in God's favour, to know the worth of it by the want of it. If the withdrawing of the sense God's favour have filled saints' hearts with intolerable pangs, near akin to those of the damned in hell, oh what an inexpressible horror and anguish shall the hearts of the lost feel, when they see all their fond and groundless hopes frustrated, having given up the ghost, and in the room of their self-made comforts, weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth; instead of wine and mirth, sensual delights and pleasures, to drink of the wine of the wrath of God, poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation, where soul and body must be tormented with fire and brimstone, in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb.† Ah, dreadful disappointment! ah, woful state of graceless sinners! poor soul, what a heaviest case art thou in, there is but a step betwixt thee and death, but a hair-breadth betwixt thee and hell, it is but stopping thy borrowed breath, and thou art in

* 2 Thess. i. 7—9.

† Rev. xiv. 10, 11.

endless misery; God hath ways enough to dispatch thee, and Satan, whom thou art serving, is waiting for a commission to seize thee! he pusheth thee forward into sin apace, that thou mayest hasten into the same condemnation with him; God also leaves thee to thyself, and glad thou art of it, that thou canst pass on undisturbed to the pit of destruction. Now, thou canst laugh at death as a fable, slight the thoughts of damnation as unconcerned therein, despise the way of obtaining God's favour as unimportant; thou art now ripening for ruin, sin hath made thee as stubble fully dry, and justice is upon the road to tear thee up, and cast thee into the fire of eternal wrath, and though thou art sleeping upon the bed of carnal security, yet thy judgment of a long time lingereth not, and thy damnation slumbereth not.* Oh couldst thou have a look into hell, and see what is become of those graceless souls that were once as careless and confident as thou art, it would affright thee out of thy wits, or wickedness; and indeed it is a wonder that guilty consciences discovering wrath over them, and hell flaming beneath, do not run mad, and lay violent hands on themselves, like Judas, or at least roar out like tormented fiends as Spira did. I often think of what Augustin said, "I would not for all the world be in an unregenerate state one hour, lest in that hour death should snatch me away, and thrust me into hell." Oh that thy heart, poor sinner, did meditate terror! Oh that the sinners in Zion were but afraid, and would bethink themselves how they are able to dwell with devouring fire, with everlasting burnings!† or rather, that you might inquire some way of escaping that wrath to come, those everlasting torments. But there is no hope, sinners will not fear, till they feel what

* 2 Pet. ii. 3.

† Isa. xxxiii. 14, 18.

God's favour means by the want of it, and what his wrath means by painful experience. It seems it must be the sad fate of poor ministers still to labour in vain, and to cry out, who hath believed our report? * Well, poor sinners will feel what now they will not believe; though we die, yet God's word of threatening will take hold of them; and though now they will not lay it to heart, yet at last they shall consider it perfectly, the time is coming when it shall be known whose words shall stand, God's or theirs; † death and judgment will determine the controversy. You will say, perhaps, why so much said about God's favour? are we not all in God's favour? we hope God will not be so severe as you are: will God disown us? we trust not, God is more merciful than to consign us to misery.

Answer. Do you think all men are in God's special favour? that is contrary to Scripture and reason; or do you think God will cast none into hell for ever? If you will not believe God's word, you shall have your confutation another way, but it shall be a costly conviction. Do I need to tell you again, that God will not be merciful to any wicked transgressors; and that it is a people of no understanding, therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour? That man is in a sad state indeed, who cannot be saved unless God be false to his word, who must be eternally lost if God be true. The Scriptures inform us, that unregenerate, unholy, unconverted sinners cannot be saved, that they are not in God's favour, yet very many hope it may be otherwise, that is, they hope that God is not God; for if he is God, he must be true, righteous, and holy, not indulging men in sin to gratify their lusts, nor yet saving their souls to please their selfish humours. They

* Isa. xlix. 4. liii. 1.

† Zech. i. 5, 6.

will find it fall out far otherwise; be they great or small, they shall find that God will cast them out of his favour if they have slighted his love.

But that I may discuss this conviction more fully, and bring it home to the conscience, I shall speak to four classes of persons: namely,

Presumers, abusers, neglecters, and rejecters of God's favour.

1. Presumers on the favour of God, who imagine they are in God's favour, and yet have no true Scripture warrant for it; for he that hopes without solid ground from the word of God is a presumer, and alas, many do so. Suppose a poor beggar please himself with imagining that such a rich man would give him a thousand pounds, but hath no promise nor encouragement from him of any such kindness, will not all persons laugh him to scorn for such a fond delusion? Was that madman at Athens any richer for claiming every ship that came into harbour for his own? Who so confident as those that have least ground? I have observed the following, palpable differences betwixt a presuming hypocrite, and a true child of God.

(1.) That mere professors of religion are fond of applying God's favour to themselves, but genuine Christians are very jealous, are troubled with many doubts and fears about it, you can hardly persuade them of it; while you cannot keep off the former from grasping at it by misapplication.

(2.) Mere formalists dream of God's favour without the consideration of his justice, truth, and holiness; whereas a penitent child of God is very apt to pass over the thoughts of mercy, being much exercised with dreadful apprehensions of his justice: Alas, saith he, how shall I escape the terrible justice of a sin-avenging God? and he is never quieted till he see how

justice and mercy embrace each other in Christ's mediation.

(3.) Presumptuous nominal Christians run all upon justification by God's grace and favour, but forget sanctification, and their own duty; whereas a gracious soul, longing after holiness in heart and life, is discouraged because so little is visible.

(4.) The poor presuming soul dreams of God's favour absolutely, but studies not gospel conditions, to which God's favour with all the effects thereof are promised; and a pious Christian dares not apply pardon, reconciliation, &c. because he finds not that faith and repentance which he knows God requireth, and to which he annexeth the effects of his special favour in Christ. Oh what damnable delusions are built upon these mistakes! Alas, how many are gulled and beguiled with misinformations and misconstructions in these fundamental cases!

Here I might reckon up the many pleas and pretences men bring to persuade themselves that they are in God's favour, I shall but glance at them, I need not stand to confute them.—One hopes he is in God's favour because he is prospered in the world, as it respects estate, friends, health, and honour; but if so, the Turk can boast of success and favour as much as any.—Another on the contrary thinks he is in God's favour because afflicted, then souls tormented in hell might plead God's favour.—Some plead they hear the best preachers, enjoy pure ordinances, but Christ cashiers those who on this account pleaded his favour, Luke xiii. 26.—Others God hath honoured with notable gifts of discourse, prayer, and knowledge, but Saul and Judas, yea, the devil himself might infer God's favour from gifts with as much reason as they can have.—Some plead a change in their course, and some

visible reformation of life; but this of itself will not evidence God's favour, 2 Peter ii. 20.—Others plead that they are merciful, forgiving, mild to such as offend them, and they hope for favour from God; but Saul was destitute of piety, and out of favour, notwithstanding this good property, 1 Sam. xi. 13. x. 27.—Some think they have God's favour, because they beg it in every undertaking, and would not set about any enterprise without it; but Saul a hypocrite, and at last cast off did as much, 1 Sam. xiii. 12; also if God answered not, he examined the reason to find out the sin that hindered God's favour, 1 Sam. xiv. 37, 38; besides he shewed great dislike to sin, and zeal to punish it, and effect a reformation, ver. 33. 39; he even continued his duties after he heard that God had cast him out of favour, see 1 Sam. xv. 23—31; yet for all this, he was not in God's favour and quite rejected.—Others plead their love to God, and respect for his people, but there is such a love to God and his people as doth not evidence special grace; thus even a Saul, a Balaam, and wicked men may not be altogether void of love to God and his saints.—Some plead convictions of conscience, terrors, fears, humiliations, deep foretastes of another world, which is no more than Ahab, Felix, Judas,* and those described in Heb. vi. 4. 5, could plead.—Others imagine their soundness in the faith, harmless conversation, hearing the word gladly, doing much in compliance therewith, will at least evidence, if not procure God's favour; but the following passages, Rom. ii. 18—24. Phil. iii. 6. Mark vi. 20, will overturn this conceit.—Some will presume to argue themselves into God's favour from their diligence in duties, their inquires after the will of God and salvation, but those mentioned in Isa. lviii. 2, and the young man,

* 1 Kings xxi. 27. Acts xxiv. 25.

Matt. xix. 20, were as fit to plead this as they, yet were not in special favour.—Others hope God favours them because they are much affected under ordinances, enlarged in duties, and continue long in fasting and prayer, but the Pharisees and stony-ground hearers had as much reason to plead in this manner as they, Luke xviii. 11, 12. Matt. xxiii. 14. xiii. 21.—And others can go along with the foolish virgins in having lamps, trimming them, keeping company with wise virgins, desiring grace, using some endeavours to obtain it, yet alas, cast out of the chamber with “I know you not,” Matt. xxv. 2—12.

I say not but these things are good so far as they go, however they are defective in their consequences, and not sufficient evidences of God’s favour, or special love in Christ; you must look out for more satisfying grounds. Observe it, there is nothing wherein persons are more apt to be mistaken, and more endangered by mistaking than imagining they are in God’s favour. Men are apt to flatter themselves with hopes of immunity in sin, from a conceit of the mercy of God, and though they live sinfully, yet they say, “Is not the Lord among us? none evil can come unto us,” Micah iii. 11, 12. Alas, poor sinner, it is not thy confidence, but scriptural evidence that will carry it. It is a sad overwhelming consideration to hear deluded sinners expressing high hopes of God’s favour, but when you examine their reasons, they have not one that will carry water, or have any weight in the balances of the sanctuary. Art thou in God’s favour when thou hast never been sensible of his displeasure, and hast not yet been brought through the pangs of regeneration? Art thou in God’s favour, and canst not produce as evidence a gospel repentance, justifying faith, labour of love, or any one saving grace in sincerity? Canst thou imagine

thou art in God's favour, when thou never didst give up thyself to God in covenant to be ruled by his laws, and comply with his will? Art thou in God's favour that either makest no conscience of worshipping God, or dost it but formally, and knowest not what it is to pour out thy soul before him, or enjoy communion with him? Nay, but, man, how canst thou judge thyself in God's favour, when thy conscience tells thee of a delicious sin in which thou takest pleasure, and with which thou art loth to part, which is totally inconsistent with God's favour? For if thouregardest iniquity in thy heart, God will not hear thy prayer,* nor respect thy person. Men may flatter thee, and say, Peace, peace; good men may be deceived with thee, and approve of thee; thou mayest have quietness in thine own conscience, and sing thyself asleep on the bed of security; but all this while God may thunder out threatenings against thee, and hate thee as his enemy, and cast thy soul into torments for ever. Alas, poor souls, how we poor ministers could weep over you that are enemies to the cross of Christ! O that you did but see your danger before it be too late! O that God in mercy to your souls would deliver you from everlasting burnings!

2. Another class to be reprov'd, are abusers of God's favour. Now men abuse his favour two ways: first, by invalidating it; and secondly, by perverting it.

(1.) By rendering the favour of God null, or ineffectual to accomplish his designs thereby. God's favour should leave a sweet savour upon men's spirits, and lead their souls to him. Rom. ii. 4, "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth to re-

* Psal. lxvi. 18.

pentance?" that is, should lead to repentance and new obedience. Alas, that these silken, silver cords of love and favour, should draw our iron hearts no nearer God!* since God's goodness is such an attractive loadstone, and hath won so many hearts! Alas, sirs, what are you made of? where is your ingenuousness? If men had expressed the thousandth part of favour to you; O what tenderness of heart would it have wrought? and shall God's kindness be lost? will you always go on to receive the grace of God in vain? will you go on to return evil for good, hatred for his good-will? Alas, that you should still depart from your best friend, and forsake your own mercies; you may be sure that the more favours are conferred on you, the more coals of fire are heaped on your heads, if you attain not God's end; besides, you do evidently demonstrate that you are among the wicked; for of them it is said, Isa. xxvi. 10, "Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness." Wilfulness under kindnesses is a black brand of a wicked heart; reprobates are usually hardened by that which softens others; when word, rod, love, light, convictions, and all discussions rather make worse than better, it is fearful. Lord, pity that soul upon which all likely means are lost; cursed ground, which neither shower nor sunshine, human diligence nor heavenly influences make fruitful, in reference to which thou hast said, Lay it waste, throw it to the common with a gospel curse upon it, let no fruit grow on thee henceforth for ever; if after all it bear thorns and briars it is rejected, nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned, Heb. vi. 8.

(2.) By perverting God's favours, and turning them to a wrong use and end. Those are ungodly men that turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, Jude, 4. As

* Hosea xi. 4.

when men do pervert the outward comforts of life, which are God's favours, and use them as provisions for the flesh, weapons of unrighteousness, incentives to sin, and instruments to serve Satan, by gluttony, drunkenness, pride, or lust. Oh how ill doth God take this, yea, the very creature groans under this evil; and the usual fruit thereof is either plucking that person from the world, or pulling that abused mercy out of his hands: see Hos. ii. 8, 9. But oh that God's indulgence should be abused by wretched sinners, as a pillow to lay their heads and sleep upon! yet thus it oft proves: Ecces. viii. 11, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the children of men is fully set in them to do evil." The better God is to them, the worse they will be, desperate antipodes to heavenly bounty, like marshy earth, when the more it is manured the more barren it grows, or a bad soil that produceth weeds instead of herbs under the droppings of heaven. But O what prodigious monsters are those that argue from kindness to self-murdering cruelty, from God's mercy to a lawless liberty to sin, from the abounding of gospel grace to the abounding of iniquity: such diabolical reasoners as these, the apostle Paul repels with an *absit*, "God forbid:"* Rom. vi. 1, 2, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid." Far be that from us to make such a lawless inference; let it never be spoken or done in Christ's school; let no man that pretends to be a saint shew himself so irrational and illogical, as either wilfully to commit a sin in hopes of pardon, as if God's pardons were like the Pope's dispensations to break God's laws, or else to return unto folly after peace spoken, and presume that God is gracious, and will not punish or finally condemn him: it will

* Μὴ γένοιτο.

appear that as God hath favours to bestow, he hath also justice to execute, and when mercy goes off the stage, severity shall enter, and act a dreadful tragedy in reference to the poor sinner ; these favours will be converted into faggots to scorch the sinner in hell for ever ; this sweet oil of love will, when kindled into flame, be like melted lead poured upon his naked soul with addition of multiplied tortures. As the sense of unkindness torments awakened consciences, under great kindnesses, so the fruits of unkindnesses are incensed wrath and indignation ; abused mercy turns into fury ; the more of heaven here, if men are regardless of it, the more of hell hereafter. Justice will be most glorified where grace hath been most magnified and vilified ; if God's justice enter an action against us, the appeal is to God's throne of grace in Christ ; but if grace and love itself commence a suit against us, whither can we flee for relief or remedy ?

3. Among those persons that fall under the lash of conviction may be reckoned neglecters of God's favours, refusers of his kindnesses, that prefer, first, men's favour ; or, secondly, sensual pleasures to the favour of God.

(1.) How many, alas, are there that ambitiously desire the favour of the great men of the world ! many will entreat the favour of the prince, and every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts. This ambitious humour of pleasing men to obtain or maintain their favour and good-will, is a great obstruction to faith, and destruction to sinners : John v. 44, " How can you believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only ? " Sometimes, it seems, men's favour is inconsistent with the favour of God, and true believers find it a hard matter to abandon their credit, or venture upon dis-

grace or the world's disfavour, for Christ; a Moses could do it, but many fail here; it is a very tender point, a man's good name is himself, and what good will his life do him when reputation is gone? How can men live in the world, when out of all men's favour? This is hard to pass, few come to a decision, and say, Lord, let me have thy favour with the forfeiture or loss of all men's favour. But alas, what good will the favour of great men do you in the hour of death, or day of judgment? then the light of their countenance shall be cast down; alas, they cannot relieve their own aching heads or condemned souls; ask them to befriend you, that God may not be angry, see if they can bail you from the arrest of death, or bring you off at the bar of God, yea, try in lesser matters now, make the experiment in your pangs of conscience, or pains of body, and see if their favour or friendship can drive away either; no, alas, they cannot help themselves in these cases, in God's favour alone there is life, yet almost all men slight the favour of God, and make no great reckoning of it. God may reserve his favours for whom he pleaseth, for their parts they stand in need of no such thing in their vain imagination, but when death and judgment come their eyes will be opened, and their hearts roundly convinced of this truth, that "in God's favour is life."

(2.) Many prefer the gratifications of appetite and sensual pleasures, esteeming them more highly than God's favour; they observe lying vanities, and so forsake their own mercies, Jonah ii. 8. Poor wretched, sensual creatures, that matter not God's favour, that is, his special distinguishing kindness and love, if they may enjoy what gratifies the flesh. Alas, can the enjoyment of sensual delights, or worldly profits any way compensate for the loss of God's favour? meats

for the belly, and the belly for meats, but God will destroy both it and them.* Alas, both pleasures and body will be removed in a little time, and all gratifications will vanish away, as if they had never been; but God's favour will endure for ever, yea, will make persons both perfectly and perpetually happy; 1 John ii. 17, "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doth the will of God abideth for ever." Ah, sinner, when thou shalt see those gracious souls that longed, panted, prayed, and endeavoured for the favour of God above their lives, made happy in God's immediate presence, and thy miserable soul (which took the world for its portion, and was well satisfied, if thou hadst so much of the fruits of God's common bounty, as to gratify sense, while thou slightedst God's special favour,) at last banished from his face and favour for ever; oh how will this add new wounds to thy despair, thou wilt be ready thus to bemoan thy soul: Ah wretched creature that I am, woe unto me! time was that God's favour might have been had, Christ procured it, the new covenant contained it, the gospel promised it, ministers offered it, many looked after it, and now possess it in yonder glorious mansions, but I poor careless sinner slighted it, did not judge it worth a sigh, a prayer, or an inquiry for obtaining it, I presumed that I had it, would not be beat off that fond conceit, I judged them fools, or my enemies that would have me question it, or I was taken up with other matters, and was contented with the common enjoyments of this world; but alas, now I see, now at last, now too late, I am forced| to discern both worth and want together; I am now banished from what I slighted, and that punishment of loss of God's favour is both equitable and what might have been expected; woe is

* 1 Cor. vi. 13.

me, I shall never see his reconciled face, my former sensual pleasures are gone, as if they had never been, but the sting still remains and pierces my soul, and will gnaw my conscience for ever. O that I had considered this betimes! O that I had read, and heard, and prayed, and examined conscience, and asked questions for the purpose of discovering my real state, and a way to obtain assurance of God's favour! O that I had wallowed in dust and ashes with a broken heart, and weeping eyes all my days! O that I had made it my business to lay open all my sins by confession, to condemn myself at the bar of justice, and to make a timely appeal to the throne of grace! O that my soul had had a true, lively, saving faith, instead of this fancied faith that now undoeth me, by deceiving me! I thought faith was nothing but a belief that I was in God's favour, that my sins were pardoned, and my soul should be saved, that is, that I must believe a lie; for now I feel by sad experience it was not so, there was no reality in these things. O that I had made diligent inquiry into the nature, properties, and actings of true justifying faith; possibly I might have escaped these torments, and have sat down with yonder blessed souls at God's right hand in his immediate presence! but my day is gone, the gulf is fixed, my hopes are lost, the day of grace is over, my soul is lost, and must for ever, for ever be banished from the presence of the Lord, and punished with everlasting destruction from the powerful hand of a sin-avenging God; this is the dreadful fruit of slighting the special favour of the eternal God. But you will say, are there any such men as slight the favour of God? and who are they? I answer, yes, scripture and experience tell us of many instances; there are but too many Esaus that for a

morsel sell their heavenly birth-right;* the time would fail me to reckon up a cursed Ham, a mocking Ishmael, a stupid Saul, a treacherous Judas, an apostate Julian, and all the rabble of profane wretches that are gone down to hell for slighting the favour of God: and I may say to every graceless sinner, how canst thou escape, that neglectest so great salvation?† Alas, it is plain enough thou dost not mind nor matter this affair; thy language, thy carriage, thy whole conversation declare to thy conscience and others, that thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter:‡ alas, poor creature, where are thy cares, fears, tears, and soul exercises about this business? didst thou ever examine thyself about it? what time dost thou spend daily in seeking God with thy whole heart? how doth it take up thy thoughts, what thou must do if death should arrest thee? art thou at uncertainties in this case? canst thou spend days, and weeks, and months, and years, and never think of this, as though thou wert totally unconcerned in it? does any thing rather than this take up thy mind? the God of heaven pity thee, thy case is sad, thou art out of God's favour. But more of this in another place.

4. The last description of persons that are exposed to reproof, are rejecters of the favour of God; such there are that do not only turn their backs upon the favour of God, but trample the pearls of religion under their feet: these are of two sorts, first, gross offenders; and secondly, hot persecutors.

(1.) Gross sinners, brutish spirits, that like atheists put far off the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near—that lie upon beds of ivory, and eat the lambs out of the flock—that drink wine in bowls||—

* Heb. xii. 16.

‡ Acts viii. 21.

† Heb. ii. 3.

|| Amos vi. 3—7.

that spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave, yea, to hell, who are these? the text brands them for atheists, therefore they say unto God, "depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways: what is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?"* This is not only the heart and life language, but even the lip language of the atheists of our days: "what matter is it whether people pray or not? for ought we see it goeth as well with such as make no great stir in religion, as those that keep up such a mighty noise; men make more ado than needs; if there be a God, (putting it in doubt as the devil to Eve at first) yet this God hath an equal respect to all his creatures, he is all goodness, and surely would not make creatures to damn them, and it is but a fond thing for men to torment themselves with melancholy conceits of another world, which is uncertain; we know what we are, or have been, but we know not what we shall be hereafter: therefore let us live a merry life, cast away cares, and skim the cream of creature enjoyments; let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die, and there is an end of us." And indeed no wonder such hogs as these live a swinish life, since they have the atheist's belief; and when they are full of the husks of these low creature comforts, no wonder that they lift up their snouts against heaven,† and scorn the dainties of the upper table. I must leave these incarnate devils, (nay, worse than the devil, for he cannot be an atheist, though it is his work to make atheists) to the disappointments they shall meet with, being confident that those that despise divine favour shall feel the anger, and lie under the insupportable displeasure of

* Job xxi. 13—15.

† *Plenus porcorum siliquis non desiderat hanc suavitatem.*

that God, whose friendship they wilfully reject. In the mean time, let those wretched sinners that choose death before life, yea, that practically judge themselves unworthy of God's favour, and of eternal life, consider but that one affecting heart-melting text, Psal. lxxxi. 8—12. See the pathetic oratory God useth to win his people's hearts to him, enumerating his relation to them, promises, former providences, and willingness to do for them as much as they can ask: "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it;" yet after all this, listen to God's complaint, "But my people would not hearken to my voice, Israel would none of me;" as if he had said, alas, my people thought me not worth owning, they supposed my favour would do them no good, I was not at all prized by them, they imagined they could shift well enough without me. The God that made them and upholds them offered them his grace and love, yea, himself to make them happy. But I was rejected, they would have none of me for their husband, Lord, and Saviour, I must leave them unconquered, not prevailing on them that I might do them good, my Spirit must go away grieved from them, it seems they and I must part; well, I will turn them loose, I will leave them to themselves, I have given them over to their own heart's lusts, and now they are filling up the measure of their sins, and when they have come to the height, I will hide my face from them, and take away the hedge of my common providence, and I will see what their end shall be.* It will be seen what poor shift they can make to secure their hearts from terror, and their souls from torments; to whom now will they flee for help, and where will they leave their glory? without me they shall bow down

* Deut. xxxii. 20.

under the prisoners, (chained devils) and they shall fall down under the slain with the rest of lost souls in everlasting confusion.* Oh then there shall be weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, then I will laugh at their calamity, and mock when their fear cometh; then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer, for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord, they would none of my counsel, they despised all my reproof, Prov. i. 24—33; read Jer. xvi. 5, 13, 17, 18.

(2.) There are some so desperate in rejecting God's favour, that they reject all that have it, and like those the worse that are in favour with God; they only consult to cast him down from his excellency,† who is in high favour with God; the more God expresseth his love, the more they express their hatred, as Ishmael did mock Isaac, or as the patriarchs their father's darling Joseph. There is a spirit of envy that swells in the hearts of the wicked against such as are higher in God's books than themselves; what envy wrought in the hearts of the Pharisees against our Saviour, because he said he was the Son of God? what bedlam rage possessed the frantic Jews against Stephen when he said he saw the heavens opened? they cried with a loud voice, stopped their ears, ran upon him like madmen.‡ The like do malignant villains against the saints at this day, if they hear any speak, though with words of truth and soberness, of their experience, interest in God, communion with him, evidences of his special favour, &c. Alas, because these sottish beings relish not these things, though it be in scripture language, and according to the warrant of the word, yet they are ready to mock them, and call them in scorn the godly, holy brethren, or holy sisters; but indeed

* Isa. x. 3, 4.

† Psal. lxii. 4.

‡ Acts vii. 56, 57.

accounting them a pack of canting hypocrites, that are worse than others, because they will needs be better than others, and will take upon them to censure their neighbours, as low, carnal, and wicked, because they talk not at the same rate of high flown nonsense, (as they deem it) with themselves; thus sober gracious Christians are branded as fools, fanatics, enthusiasts, and scoffed at with hellish disdain, as Pharisees, Separatists, or those the prophet speaks of, that say, stand by thyself, come not near to us, for we are holier than thou.* But alas, these wretched adversaries of the truth, know not how to distinguish betwixt an empty ostentation of holiness, and a sober profession of the power of godliness, and so speak evil of the things they know not, and dash themselves upon the rock of persecution, both as to the sin and punishment, undoing themselves for ever. O that men would be wise at last, and not strike at Christ through the loins of his members, nor kick against the pricks. Think with thyself, man, when thou art abusing professors, such a one is either a hypocrite, or a saint; if a hypocrite notwithstanding this fair show, then woe to me that have not gone half this length, never wept and prayed, and lived as he hath done; he hath far out-gone me, and yet he is short of grace and heaven. O then, how far short am I, that am so far short of him? woe is me, I must mend my pace, or I shall come far behind; shall he perish with all those experiences, and what shall become of me that have none at all? I had need give over mocking, and fall a working for my poor soul. Or if he be indeed no hypocrite, but a real saint, (as for ought I know he is, for it is too great a work for me to judge the heart contrary to words or actions) O what a fearful case am I in, who am fighting against God, and

* Isaiah lxx. 5.

scorning those whom God is pleased to own? better a millstone were hanged about my neck, and myself be cast into the depth of the sea.* How dare I look that God in the face whose favourites I have despised? Will not their master take his servants' part? What good can I do in opposing them who are approved by the great God? Let my soul be in their soul's case, both now and at the great day; Lord, have mercy upon my soul, and be favourable to me.

Secondly, I shall now briefly address the children of God, that are indeed really under the cheering beams of divine favour, but are such as deserve reproof also on these four accounts:—

Slighting, doubting, mistaking, and misusing God's favour.

1. Slighting God's favour. Alas, how few of us do esteem God's favour as life? ah, where is a holy David that could say, thy loving-kindness or benignity is better than life? Psalm lxiii. 3. Objects of sense are near us, and usually more affect us, seldom are our hearts taken up with the thoughts of it, or have any endearedness to it. How few of us do stir up ourselves to lay hold upon God, and stimulate our hearts to labour, and lay out ourselves to obtain an assurance in our hearts, that we are indeed in the favour of God? nay, cannot we be often without the feeling of God's favour a long time? at best do we not prize the gift more than the Giver? It is a piece of egregious folly to look at the hand more than the free mind in a gift. Do not outward comforts please us more than the comforts of grace, left-hand more than right-hand blessings? Ah, sirs, are the consolations of God small to you? are you afraid of being happy? Is the favour of men worth seeking, and is God's favour of no value?

* Matt. xviii. 6.

Shall God propound and promise the mercy, shall Christ purchase it, shall the Spirit offer and convey it, yea, assure us of it, and shall we still make light of it? And shall the Lord wait to be gracious, and our hearts be loth to entertain the fruits of his grace? Will not a day come, when we shall have need of the assurance of God's love? Will not slight thoughts of God's favour wound deep at death, or in soul-trouble? Ah, that we could be ashamed of our own egregious folly. O Lord, how lamentable that thy children should prize their Father's smiles no more! What is of worth, of use, if God's favour be not? what can do you good without it? how can you desire to go to heaven, if you desire not that wherein heaven doth consist? Lord, pardon this woful senselessness, ingratitude, and security.

2. Many of God's children are much dispirited, discouraged, and dejected in this case; full of fears, jealousies, and misgivings of heart; when they remember God they are troubled, as David saith, Psalm lxxvii. 3. thinking, oh but this God is none of my God, I have no title to his special favour. How many such poor crest-fallen saints are there, that are ready to groan out their souls in sad complaints, with deserted David? Psalm vii. 8, 9. Hence proceed the soul's sad and slavish fears on approaching God, or rather, when the soul comes not to God: and observe it, the less you come to God, the less willing will you be to come to him; guilt and fears breed strangeness. "Oh, I have conducted myself in such a way that I dare not look God in the face, his justice affrights me, his mercy hath taken its leave of me, my soul is in darkness, and darkness begets terror; I am afraid God will call my sins to remembrance, I have little ground to expect his favour, but rather may fear his frowns, yet dare not

but come though dragged into God's presence, as though he would rather hurt than help this self-condemning spirit." Oh how unbecoming a saint is this uncomfortableness of mind! where is a sense of God's love, trusting in his mercy, delighting in God, rejoicing in his praise? Alas, by this means legal terrors prevail instead of evangelical tenderness, a heart full of fears takes the place of a soul full of love: thus true religion degenerates into a spurious servility; instead of amicable approaches to God as a friend, desponding souls are ready to remain at a distance from him, as though he were an enemy, or to imagine by duties they shall bribe or flatter the infinite Majesty to treat them gently. Alas, sirs, this is not that reverence and godly fear of which the Scripture speaks, but a base-born cowardice of spirit, or unbecoming trembling that vents itself in superstition or apostacy; for either such persons worship God according to their fancies, to please him, and pacify his anger, or quite fall off to atheism, for men will soon leave what they love not; and if such could cast off this fear, they would cast off this care of religion, but christianity engageth to a fearing of the Lord and his goodness, and approaching to him, and conversing with him from a persuasion of his forgiving grace.* Alas, sirs, is not God infinitely good and gracious? is not his favour towards them that fear him? doth not the Lord take pleasure in his people,† and should not his people take pleasure in God? Is not the joy of the Lord our strength? doth it become God's own children to serve him grudgingly? Have we not been undone by our criminal jealousies and unbelief? The Lord humble us for the peevishness, sourness, and untowardness of our wicked hearts, and help us for the future under a sense of his favour

* Hos. iii. 5. Psalm cxxx. 4.

† Psalm cxlix. 4.

to serve the Lord with gladness, and to come before his presence with singing.*

3. The ground of all this discouragement is mistaking God's favour. Alas, there is much misjudging betwixt man and man, that breeds much unkindness : but oh how sad is it for Christians, God's dear children, to mistake God's dispensations, first, in point of correction ; and secondly, as to evidences of peculiar regard in spiritual things.

(1.) Though God over and over again tell his children, that his heart may be towards them even then when his hand is upon them ; nay, that whom the Lord loves he chasteneth : yet how hard is it for a child of God to read love on the rod, even covenant love and faithfulness ? How few can see divine favour in taking as well as giving a mercy ? Few of us know how to rejoice in God with Habakkuk on the world's disappearing ; † and fewer that can rejoice in tribulation. ‡ But under affliction we cry out of wrath, nothing but wrath,—he comes to call my sins to remembrance, he comes to kill me, this is one of God's arrows of vengeance, now he is beginning his controversy, which will not end till my soul be in hell. When God snatches away child, estate, or name, oh, say you, I am undone, this is a fruit of God's displeasure ; but have you not as good reason to say, O what love is in this stroke ? God is removing my idol of jealousy, this child I prized at too high a rate, it is fit that that should go which interposeth betwixt my affections and God ; I grew extravagant with my estate, or secure, and was saying my mountain stands strong, I shall never be moved ; blessed be God that would not suffer my soul to take any rest in the creature ; O what a mercy is this, that God hath dried up that stream

* Psalm c. 2.

† Hab. iii. 17.

‡ Rom. v. 3.

from which I was in danger of having a surfeit, that I might drink more freely of the fountain of the water of life; it is rich favour that he will take the pains to scourge me, and bring me home by weeping-cross, rather than suffer me to wander from him by waywardness of spirit.—This were indeed becoming a child of God; but how few of God's children thus reason, and how seldom can the best taste honey on the rod of correction?

(2.) The children of God are too apt to mistake the very smiles of God's face, and the true genuine tokens of his favour, though conveyed to them by the hand of the Spirit: surely it is a sad thing to father God's gracious impressions upon the father of lies, as well as to lay the devil's brats at God's door. When God communicates gracious intimations as evidences of his love, it is an unworthy thing to call these delusions, or sparks of our own kindling; this must go to God's heart, he must take it very unkindly. It is true, Satan can transform himself into an angel of light, but the Spirit's sealings carry their own evidence along with them, and the Scripture touch-stone tries both satanical delusions, and the Spirit's manifestations; God's cordials are of another nature, and produce different effects from Satan's kickshaws. O how often, Christian, God hath shone upon thy soul? how sweetly and seasonably have the patents of divine love been confirmed? how many a kind welcome hast thou had from God? what a line of love hath been drawn through all God's conduct towards thee? and yet dost thou question this favour, or believe the infernal spirit rather than the God of truth, or thy undoubted experience? Ah, how unworthy a thing is this? Will a father who hath borne a tender affection for his child, and who daily cares for him, take it well to have

his love questioned by every base whisper of an ill-willed adversary? That is an unhandsome retort, Mal. i. 2, "I have loved you, saith the Lord: yet ye say, wherein hast thou loved us?" they put him to prove his love upon every slight occasion. It is hard when the constant tenour of a husband's carriage towards his wife is full of tenderness, that every seeming slight must be construed as a withdrawment of affection, by a jealous wife. How ill doth God take it when Zion said, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me?" Isa. xlix. 14. And what tender expostulations doth he use to satisfy her, that it is not according to her surmise, vers. 15, 16. Alas, whence comes it to pass, that if evidences be not fairly written and legible, (though our own neglects and miscarriages often blur them) all is lost, the poor Christian questions all? Ah, sirs, may not money be in the sack's mouth, and you not see it? May not the Lord of the land be your dear brother Joseph, though you do not know him? yea, may not he be carrying on designs of love, though you have hard thoughts of him? it may be thy soul is grievously harassed with blasphemous thoughts, which thou hatest as the devil their author; well, must not God be thy friend, because Satan is thy adversary? because the devil doth tempt, doth not God love? Who more favoured of God than Christ, and who more violently assaulted than he? Doth the husband love the wife the less, because she is sorely tempted, but is vexed, tormented, burdened with impetuous solicitations to infidelity: nay, doth he not pity her, and love her the more for her faithfulness. The God of heaven knows and hears thy groans and griefs, prayers and fears, and will both succour and pardon, because he favours thee. Let the devil say what he will, and do what he can, for he is a maker of

differences, and the great tale-bearer to separate very friends. O, but what clear proofs might you produce of divine favour to confute Satan's slanders? You may be assured he is what his word represents him, and not what Satan misrepresents him. Muster up thy experiences, Christian, which have been a lively comment upon the promises, and oppose them to Satan's base insinuations, that from henceforth thou mayest not belie the Lord, nor deny his graces in thy heart, or his special favour to thy soul.

4. Misusing or abusing God's favours and kindnesses, by unthankfulness and unfruitfulness.

(1.) An unthankful heart is the grave of many favours, and shall there be no resurrection of mercies out of those graves? Israel's ingratitude was a prodigy, and Deut. xxxii. is a song to perpetuate the remembrance thereof to all generations; many receipts, no returns. O how astonishing is this? how unsuitable to the ingenuous spirit of a believer? David * could rise at midnight to give thanks, when God's favours came into his mind, and thus he calculates: "Surely the righteous shall give thanks unto thy name," Psalm cxl. 13. Paul was a man of many mercies, and a man of many praises, *Deo gratias*† was always in his mouth. Ingratitude is a heathenish sin, and leads to many vain imaginations and brutish abominations: Rom. i. 21—24. It is that foul sin that breaks out in the last times, and makes them hard and perilous, and is yoked with unholiness, 2 Tim. iii. 1, 2. It is a sin that renders men worse than brutes, even the most stupid of brutes, Isa. i. 2, 3. Ah, Christian, shame with thy ingratitude; what a base, unworthy, disingenuous spirit hast thou, who canst so easily pass by such great favours? Dost not thou thank God for

* Psalm cxix. 62.

† Thanks to God.

a meal's meat, and wilt not thou take notice of spiritual food? Canst thou deny that God hath visited thy soul with many real favours? what mean all these convictions, impressions, supports, and consolations that thou hast had? are all these small to thee? Do not they deserve thy praises? Is not thankfulness the tribute thou owest him? Canst thou do less than acknowledge what God hath done for thee? Shouldest thou not call upon others, and say, Come all you that fear God, and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul? * and should you not desire them to help you in praising God, as David, Psalm xxxiv. 3, "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together?" Ah, Christian, if thou be not thankful for God's favours, God loseth his glory, thou lovest the comfort of mercies, and thou wilt have a sad account to give another day. The God of heaven raise up thy heart to a thankful frame, otherwise as thou buriest former, so thou preventest future mercies; for thankfulness for past favours, is a secret solicitation for more, but God will not trust thee with what thou wantest, unless thou be thankful for what thou hast. Therefore rouse up thy dull heart to this great and pleasant duty, as David did, Psalm ciii. 1—3, and study what to render to the Lord for all his kindnesses, Psalm cxvi. 12.

(2.) Unfruitfulness betrays deficient improvement. When God's favours have been showered down upon us plentifully, how barren often are our hearts? how apt are we to return to folly after peace spoken? * It is a sad thing that any should sin against God, when the more kindness God expresseth, the greater the aggravation of sin. Hence it is, that the sins of God's people are so great, that God saith, Jer. xxxii. 30, "The children of Israel, and the children of Judah have only

* Psalm lxvi. 16.

† Psalm lxxxv. 8.

done evil before me, they only have provoked me to anger," as if the world beside were comparatively innocent. For besides that we sin against greater professions and engagements on our part, so against

The greatest advantages, and obligations laid upon us by God.

(1.) The principles God hath planted in the saints' hearts are the fruit of divine favour, and a great help against sin, and to sin notwithstanding doth aggravate sin. Ah, to sin against an enlightened mind, renewed will, sanctified affections, awakened conscience, and a divine nature, renders the sin more grievous, and the sinner's case more dangerous, at least in his own apprehension upon a thorough conviction: thus David mentions as an aggravation of his sin, Psalm li. 6, "In the hidden parts thou hast made me to know wisdom;" therefore this sin is worse in me than another who wanteth such a corrective principle to restrain sin, and promote holiness.

(2.) God's people's sins are committed against the greatest, the most endearing obligations that God lays on us, both as to light and love, mercies and means of grace. God rates the heinousness of his Israel's sin in proportion to his special kindness: Hos. xi. 4, "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love." Hos. vii. 13, 15. viii. 12. Jer. xxxi. 32, "Which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband to them;" there is great emphasis in that: see also Isa. v. 4. Jer. ii. 2—5. Mic. vi. 3, 4. Other men's sins displease God, the sins of his people grieve and vex him, because he calculated that they would behave themselves after another manner: Isa. lxiii. 8—10. God even complains of his own children, that he was broken with their treacherous hearts,* and pressed

* Ezek. vi. 9.

down as a cart pressed with sheaves ; * and indeed it pierces a man's heart when a child, or a friend, or a wife, upon whom he hath heaped many kindnesses shall behave basely or disingenuously to him ; when he may say as David did, † “ If it had been an enemy I might have borne it ; ” and as Cæsar said, ‡ “ What, thou my son, to lift up thy hand to strike me.” So may God say : what my son, my child, upon whom I have conferred so many favours, whom I have taken into so near relation with myself, whom I have effectually called and sanctified, to whom I have forgiven so many and such great sins, on whom I have conferred so many honours, with whom I have been so familiar, from whom I expected so much glory, in whom I have taken so much content ; oh that thou, even thou shouldest deal after this manner, to break my laws, grieve my Spirit, dishonour my name, abuse my favours ; oh this runs to my heart, I know not how to bear it, if it were a wicked man I could be avenged on him in another world, I could ease me of my adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies, || I can tell how to come even with them ; but for you, my children, I have an everlasting kindness for you, my design is to save your souls, and you put me to it to know what course to take with you, which makes me say, “ O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee ? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee ? ” § I have tried gentle means, and sought to win thee by love and kindness, but I see it will not do, my lenity is abused, my love is slighted, thou art hardened, I must take another course, I will do my strange work to which I am so averse, I will now use severity ; “ Behold I will melt them, and try them, for how shall I do for the daughter of my

* Amos ii. 9—13.

† Psalm lv. 12, 13.

‡ Καὶ σὺ τέκνον.

|| Isa. i. 24.

§ Hos. vi. 4.

people?"* I must not lose my children, and I see fair means will not bring them in, I must use sharper arguments, that may distress and nonplus them, and drive them to straits, that they may not know what other course to take, but to run to me for shelter. And all this is in covenant faithfulness, and pursuance of God's gracious designs of good to souls, as he saith, Hos. ii. 6, "Therefore I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall that she shall not find her paths." This is love and favour, for it is far better to be pricked with thorns, and kept in the right way; than wander into dangerous pit-falls by easy paths in an uninterrupted course. Ah, soul, thou that hast abused God's favours, mayest thank thyself for the rod, yea, and thank God that he will take the pains to scourge thee, rather than suffer thee to go on to abuse his favours.

CHAP. VIII.

THE SUBJECT CONSIDERED AS FURNISHING TOPICS FOR SELF-EXAMINATION.

Is it then a truth, that God's favour is a believer's life? and does it not become us all to ascertain whether we be in God's favour or not? O that this were well cleared up to the satisfaction of every heart. You will say, how shall I know that I am in God's favour? I will ask you four plain questions, and desire you to search your hearts for answers.

1. Hath the sense of God's anger been the death of

* Jer. ix. 7.

thy legal hopes arising from any supposed good in thyself? Have your souls been laid under deep convictions that God is angry with you, and that his anger is just? Have you searched for what sin God is angry? Have your hearts been deeply afflicted with that sin? Hath the guilt of sin lain upon your consciences, as an intolerable weight? Hast thou, reader, cried out with Isaiah, "Woe is me, I am undone because I am a man of unclean lips?" chap. vi. 5. Have thy bones been broken with penitent David? * Have God's arrows stuck fast in thee? Is there no soundness in thy flesh, because of God's anger, nor rest in thy bones because of thy sin? Hast thou even roared by reason of the disquietness of thy spirit? Psal. xxxviii. 1—11. Hast thou ever complained under the guilt of sin, and God's wrath, as a soul weary and heavy laden? † What sayest thou, hast thou ever with holy Job felt the arrows of the Almighty within thee, and the poison thereof drinking up thy spirits? Have the terrors of God set themselves in array against thee? ‡ Hast thou been pricked at the heart under the guilt of sin, as the Jews, || or with holy Paul hast thou found the commandment to be unto death? § Hast thou been slain in thy comforts, hopes and helps, under the sense of guiltiness? Ah, soul, thou didst never experience favour, till thou hast felt terror. The law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ; sense of wrath in some degree usually precedes sense of love; thou must sail from earth to heaven in the port of hell; sin must be bitter before Christ will be sweet to thee; thou wilt never know the benefit of God's favour, till thou hast lain under the sense of his anger, both in first conversion, and oftentimes in after desertions, as Heman and

* Psal. li. 8.

† Psal. xxxix. 10—12.

‡ Job vi. 4.

|| Acts ii. 37.

§ Rom. vii. 9, 10.

others of God's children have had experience :* yet with all this, the poor soul under all this displeasure, dares not but justify God, and condemn himself,† even if God should cast him into hell and eternal perdition ; he still confesseth that God punisheth him less than his iniquities deserve, looking upon it as of the Lord's mercy that he is not consumed,‡ and were it not that hell consists in the want of God's favour, a submission to the power of sin, and blaspheming God's name, the soul would willingly subject itself to what punishment the Lord should think fit to inflict upon him, that God may have the glory of his vindictive justice ; however the sinner looks upon himself as deserving it, and therefore judgeth himself worthy of death, and must shut his mouth for ever, if God should cast him into hell. || O, saith the poor convinced soul, what a dreadful malignity is there in sin ; O that abominable thing which God's soul hates ;§ what prodigious, infinite, endless evil there is in every sin ! it strikes at God's glory and Being, dishonours his name, crucifies Christ, grieves the Spirit, robs me of God's favour, darkens the sun, corrupts the air, ruins souls ; woe is me, what will become of me, my soul is in danger by reason of the Lord's anger.

2. Art thou convinced that the whole world cannot restore thee to God's favour ? Alas, all the angels in heaven, all the men on earth, all creature comforts, or created accomplishments and endeavours cannot by any means restore the soul to the favour of God ; no graces, duties or actings, can reconcile the soul to God, or conciliate his favour. Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or ten thousands of rivers of oil ? will the fruit of our brain or body atone for the

* Psal. lxxxviii. 15, 16. † Psal. li. 4. ‡ Ezra ix. 13. Lam. iii. 22.

|| 1 Cor. xi. 31. Rom. iii. 19. § Jer. xlv. 4—7.

sins of our souls? * No, no; when poor creatures have offended God, will he take a bullock out of their house, or he-goat out of their fold? No, he desires not sacrifice. † Well then, can holy men on earth interpose? No, though a Noah, Daniel, and Job, though a Lot, a Moses, and Samuel should stand up to speak good for an offending people, ‡ yet they cannot turn away God's wrath, or work upon God's heart to favour a people. Nay, suppose an angel in heaven should intercede for a sinner, he could not bring him into God's favour again, his interest with God is not sufficient to interpose betwixt an offended God, and the offending soul; he chargeth the angels with folly, to which of those holy ones then will men turn? for God's wrath will kill the foolish. || notwithstanding all that they can do for them; but even suppose these poor offending sinners should return to God with prayers, tears, and groans; alas, all their sweet incense may be abomination to him. § But what if they fast? if they do, yet God will not hear their cry. ¶ But suppose they reform their lives, obey God's commands, live holily? that is good, and absolutely necessary, yet that will not make God amends, pacify wrath, or purchase reconciliation with God; no, no, they that are in the flesh cannot please God; ** yea, though the soul be converted, and in a state of grace, yet their best righteousness is defective, and but as filthy rags; †† and without faith in Christ, the mediator, it is impossible to please God. ‡‡ A penitent sinner is convinced, that if all the holiness of all the saints in heaven and earth centered in one soul, it could not make satisfaction to justice

* Micah vi. 7.

† Psal. l. 9, 10. li. 16.

‡ Jer. xv. 1—3. Ezek. xiv. 14.

|| Job iv. 18. v. 1, 2.

§ Isa. i. 13, 15.

¶ Jer. xiv. 12.

** Rom. viii. 8.

†† Isa. lxiv. 6.

‡‡ Heb. xi. 6.

for the least sin, for sin is in a sort infinite, because the object offended is infinite; therefore the satisfaction must be commensurate with the evil that is in sin, and the infiniteness of God. God is a consuming fire to souls out of Christ; the soul dares not approach God, but through a mediator; we are accepted only in the beloved;* God is well pleased no way but in his beloved Son;† he has no friendly intercourse with sinners any way but over the mercy-seat; there is no fellowship with God in an amicable way without a mediator.‡ Alas, saith the soul, I am born out of God's favour, thus have lived, and thus must die, except infinite mercy pity me; and I see as God is infinite in mercy, so in justice, and justice must be satisfied, and I see nothing in the whole creation that can satisfy it; all the creatures are insignificant ciphers; my own righteousness is a covering too narrow to wrap myself in, or to secure my naked soul from the lashes of sin-avenging justice; what course must I take? what means must I use to obtain the favour of God, or to be delivered from the wrath to come?

3. Hast thou made it thy main business to get an interest in Jesus Christ? This is indeed the only way of accommodation: suppose a king is offended with his subjects, and he hath declared that there is no way of reconciliation with him, but employing his son to mediate for them; if those subjects prize their sovereign's favour, they will make use of the means he hath prescribed to regain it. Thus we find, Acts xii. 20, "Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nou-

* Eph. i. 6.

† Matt. xvii. 5.

‡ Exod. xxx. 6. Deut. v. 5, 27.

rished by the king's country." The case is ours, God is displeased with sinners ; we cannot subsist here safely, nor be happy in heaven without the King of heaven's favour, it becomes us therefore to sue for peace ; but no peace can be had, except the Lord Jesus, (our heavenly Blastus) be our friend to mediate for us, and the way to interest in Christ, is faith alone ; Christ's satisfaction and intercession have smoothed the brows, and quenched the wrath of God Almighty, and rendered God approachable by sinners ; he is the way, the truth, and life ; he delivers from the wrath to come ; he makes peace by the blood of his cross ; he alone brings us to God.* God saith to us, as Joseph to his brethren, " You shall not see my face except you bring your brother."† Now the old man hinders our closing with Christ, yet the poor soul wants supplies, and dares not go without Jesus Christ ; O what contests and strugglings are there to lay hold on Christ Jesus. One while the humble penitent is as John weeping, sadly weeping, because there is none in his view found to open the sealed book, and interpret what is in the Lord's heart towards sinners ; but when he is satisfied that Jesus Christ the lion of the tribe of Judah hath prevailed,‡ these despairing tears are wiped off his clouded face, and he conceives some hopes, just as Elihu describes it in Job xxxiii. 19—24, " He is chastened with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain," and so on ; at last when the ransom is found, then ver. 26, " He shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable unto him, and he shall see his face with joy : " this indeed is the only way of obtaining favour with God ; we shall behold God's reconciled face in the face of Jesus Christ.|| Let men mock on, saith the poor soul,

* John xiv. 6. 1 Thess. i. 10. Col. i. 20. 1 Peter iii. 18.

† Gen. xliii. 3.

‡ Rev. v. 4, 5.

|| 2 Cor. iv. 6.

this is my only way for God's favour, and my chief care is to get a title to Christ, this the word tells me is by believing, O that I had this faith! Lord, begin and carry on the work of faith with power; farewell all for Christ; I count all things but dung that I may win Christ and be found in him;* let all go, riches, honours, the friendship of the world, and favour of dearest relations for Christ; I will venture upon the displeasure of men, but I must have God's favour, whose favour soever I lose; therefore I must have the blessed Jesus, he is the chief of ten thousand. But a carnal heart loves the favour of men more than God's, as the Pharisees of old, John xii. 43.

4. What is God's conduct towards thee, and thy behaviour towards God? This mutual, reciprocal conduct, will be the best discovery of favour, as it is amongst friends.

First, For God's conduct towards thee, observe,

(1.) Doth not God's word single thee out by conviction? When thou hast read a chapter, or heard a sermon, hath not the Spirit of God set it home upon thy conscience, as if he had called thee by name, saying, thou art the man? so that as the unlearned Corinthian, thou hast fallen down, and said, God is in this ordinance of a truth.† This hath set thy soul a trembling under the word, and it followed thee, and would not suffer thee to rest in sin, till it awaked thy conscience, and shook thee out of thy security; though this was sharp, yet bless God for it, as a precious result of his favour.

(2.) Dost thou not find some gracious operations of God's Spirit in secret duties, such as prayer, meditation, and self-examination? doth not God's spirit draw out faith, love, repentance, and desires? doth it not some-

* Phil. iii. 8, 9.

† 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25.

times help thy infirmities with sighs and groans that cannot be expressed? * None can tell what warnings, meltings, and quickenings there are at some seasons in thy heart; God knows the meaning of his Spirit within thee. O, whence proceed all these operations? surely not from flesh and blood, nature could not stir up thy heart in this sort.

(3.) Doth not God's Spirit open thy eyes to behold, and raise thy heart to desire, the ways of God? Is not religion in its most uninviting dress to flesh and blood, most lovely in thy eyes, as it was in Moses's? † Hath not the Lord engaged thy affections with the beauty of wisdom's ways? ‡ Hath not wisdom entered into thy heart, and knowledge been sweet to thy soul? || Hast thou not found more spiritual acquaintance with gospel mysteries, and more real content in holy duties, so that it may be said, "Flesh and blood have not revealed these things to thee, but our Father which is in heaven?" Matt. xvi. 17.

(4.) Dost thou not find sometimes a comfortable return of thy poor prayers? Canst thou not say, that some mercies which God hath given, have this impressed upon them, Prayer answered? so that thou canst truly call them Samuels, that is, God's hearing: Psalm xxxiv. 4, "I sought the Lord, and he heard me." And this answer of prayer is a clear evidence that God is with us, Psalm lvi. 9. When God prepares the heart, and bows his ear, is not that a great token of his special favour? Psalm x. 17.

(5.) Hath not preventing grace seasonably stepped in to keep thy soul from sin? Just as thou hast been entering upon temptation, upon the brink ready to fall, hath not the mercy of God held thee up? § hath

* Rom. viii. 26.

† Heb. xi. 26.

‡ Prov. iii. 17.

|| Prov. ii. 10.

§ Psalm xxxviii. 15—17.

not God prevented thee with his blessings of goodness? Psalm xxi. 3. How oft hath God kept thy heart and the temptation asunder? and how many times kept thee from the commission of those sins to which thou hast been inclined and engaged?

(6.) Hath not assisting grace come in with secret and seasonable supports, according to the promise, "My grace shall be sufficient for thee?" and according to David's experience, Psalm cxxxviii. 3, "In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul?" How many a time has the Lord been ready to save thee when thy heart was fainting, and flesh failing? * O what seasonable and satisfying incomes have fetched thee again to life; surely there was rich favour in these.

(7.) Hath not God by his Spirit sometimes sealed his love to thy soul? Look into thy heart, look back upon experience, is there never a token of love? Hath not God's Spirit brought its own evidence along with it, and put thy soul out of doubt, as if thou hadst heard an audible voice, saying, I have loved thee, saith Jehovah: what sayest thou? Though thou canst not expect immediate revelations, yet hast thou not been satisfied of these divine intimations and whisperings to thy heart, and of the Spirit's witnessing or sealing? † especially considering,

[i.] That his favour came in the way of a promise; this token of love was wrapped up in the word: Psal. cxix. 65, "Thou hast dealt well with thy servant according to thy word."

[ii.] That it was conveyed to thy soul in duties after many prayers, tears, repentings, and actings of faith. When the soul hath been digging in the valley of Baca,

* Isa. xxxviii. 20. Psalm lxxiii. 26.

† Rom. viii. 16. Eph. i. 13.

or of weeping, God's rain of love fills the pools, and so makes it a valley of Beracah, or blessing, Psalm lxxxiv. 6.

[iii.] The sense of God's favour came in suitably and seasonably : when thou wast at extremities, and wast saying, Will he be favourable no more? is his mercy clean gone for ever? hath God forgotten to be gracious?—then comes in some help which makes thee say, This is my infirmity. See Psalm lxxvii. 7—10.

[iv.] The effects of God's favour do evidence whence it proceeds : for as it is said of the king's favour, Prov. xix. 12, "It is as the dew upon the grass;" even so this favour of God makes souls fruitful. What kindly operations hath it upon the heart? These warm beams of divine love have a blessed influence upon the state of the mind and feelings of the breast. This leads me to

The second thing, which is thy behaviour towards God : and this may be considered both when experiencing the manifestations of God's favour, and in the general course of thy life.

1. When God manifests his favour to thee,

(1.) Dost thou gratefully welcome and hoard up the evidences of his love? Our friends' tokens of love we lay up among our chief treasures; sealed deeds are carefully deposited; we highly value the least expression of our friends' love, yea, we value ourselves according to our friends' respects for us: Cant. viii. 10, "Then was I in his eyes as one that found favour." Is it thus with thy soul? Dost thou prize God's loving-kindness above life itself? Psalm lxiii. 3.

(2.) Art thou truly afraid of losing God's favour? Dost thou charge thine own heart and others, that they stir not up, nor awake thy beloved, as the spouse? Cant. ii. 7. Dost thou feel workings of heart, as Ezra,

chap. ix. 8, 14, after favour and grace received? Dost thou maintain thy spiritual watch? Dost thou exercise a holy jealousy over thyself and estate, lest the Lord withdraw?

(3.) Dost thou draw out, and make spiritual use of the sense of God's favour, to thy own good, and for the advantage of others? How doth God help thee to recollect experience, and say as David, Psalm xlii. 6, "O my God, my soul is cast down within me, therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, from the hill of Mizar," &c. that is, I will recollect the experience I have had of thy goodness and mercy; so for others, Psalm lxvi. 16, "Come all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul."

(4.) Do not these favours make thy soul long for the manifestations of God's favour in his immediate presence in heaven, where thou shalt be above danger of offending him, or of losing his presence? Doth not thy soul long for, and love Christ's appearing? * Is it not thy language, O when shall my soul be with God? How long shall I dwell in Meshech, and sojourn in the tents of Kedar? when shall I be in his presence, where there is fulness of joy, when shall I be satisfied with his likeness? † O those joys, those comforts, that light of the King's countenance wherein is life, true life, lasting life! If God's favour be so sweet here, when only partially enjoyed, O what will be the full vision of God in glory? when I shall see him encircled with the splendours of celestial majesty, not through a glass darkly, but face to face, and know as also I am known. ‡ O blessed day! O welcome day! when shall that day dawn? when shall my soul take her flight above yonder sun, moon, and stars, into my Saviour's

* 2 Tim. iv. 8.

† Psalm xvi. 11. xvii. 15.

‡ 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

presence, where there will be no need of them, for the glory of God doth lighten the holy city, and the Lamb is the light thereof? * O blessed day, O happy state, O secure and delightful place !

2. What is thy behaviour God-wards in the general course of thy life? for if God had a peculiar regard for thee, it will be evident from the discharging of thy duty towards God, both in the frame of thy spirit, and in thy conversation, according to this rule : you may discern the workings of God's heart towards you by the movements of your hearts towards God. Well then, let me ask thee these questions, I can but briefly propound them, and leave them to thy meditations.

(1.) Art thou afraid of doing any thing that may provoke the Lord? thou therefore hatest all sin because it is offensive to him, and sayest, "How shall I do this wickedness, and sin against God?" † Away with occasions of sin, God forbid that I should ever meddle with sin again, not because it is destructive to me, but because it is offensive to God ; nor only as provoking his wrath, but as grieving his Spirit. Thus the soul fears the Lord and his goodness. ‡

(2.) Dost thou daily walk in all ways well-pleasing to God, keeping close to his commands, yielding to the impressions of his blessed Spirit, resolving upon new obedience, with full purpose of heart cleaving to the Lord? Is it not thy main care and prayer that thou mayest walk worthy of him to all pleasing? Thou dost not matter for pleasing of men, so that thou mayest approve thy heart to God, exercising thyself to have a conscience void of offence towards God and man. ||

(3.) Dost thou make it thy work to attend upon him where he is wont to distribute his favours, especially

* Rev. xxi. 23.

† Gen. xxxix. 9.

‡ Hosea iii. 5.

|| Acts xi. 23. Col. i. 10. Gal i. 10. Acts xxiv. 16.

in all public ordinances, hearing the word, offering prayer, and receiving the seals of the covenant? Dost thou make it thy business to hold communion with God? Thou art grieved when thou missest an opportunity of enjoying God, yea, thou makest this thy object in all duties, to seek and see God's face, Psalm xxvii. 4, 8, 9.

(4.) Is not thy soul troubled when God withdraws from thee the sense of his favour? When thou hast provoked him, and he goeth, doth not thy heart fail? art thou not sick of love?* how dost thou take it? Dost thou carry thyself as Esau, when he had sold his birth-right, that ate and drank, rose up, and went away? † or dost thou lay it deeply to heart, languish, and faint? art thou filled with anguish and pain, and canst rest no where, till God's favour be regained? This is a child-like frame.

(5.) Hast thou not a regard for all those whom God regards? dost thou not highly prize, and dearly love the saints that are excellent in the earth, in whom is all thy delight? ‡ dost thou not honour them that fear the Lord? Thou couldst indeed put these in thy bosom, not because they are outwardly amiable by reason of external accomplishments, or because they are of thy sentiments, but because the image of God is upon them; || grace is in their hearts, therefore they are lovely in thine eyes.

(6.) Dost thou feel the body of sin within thee thy greatest burden? Where are thy groans under it, thy griefs for it? art thou weary with it, striving against it? dost thou cry out daily with Paul, "Who shall deliver me?" Art thou still casting off every weight, and that sin which so easily besets thee? art thou still

* Cant. v. 6, 8.

‡ Psalm xvi. 3.

† Gen. xxv. 34.

|| 1 John iii. 13, 14.

purifying thyself as he is pure? dost thou look at holiness as thy great happiness? what care dost thou take to promote sanctification?*

(7.) Dost thou love God, though thou knowest not assuredly whether he love thee or not? dost thou believe in him, though thou mayest have no perception of him by sense and experience? nay, dost thou follow him as the poor woman, though he seem to flee from thee? and more than this, dost thou run to him, though he may seem to fight against thee? Have him thou must, thou canst not be put off with repulses, thy soul followeth hard after him, and his right hand upholds thee therein. This love to God is an evidence that God loves thee :† 1 Cor. viii. 3.

CHAP. IX.

THE SUBJECT FURNISHES INSTRUCTION, AND GIVES SCOPE FOR EXHORTATION.

SOME things may be pressed on the attention both of those who enjoy the favour of God, and of those who do not.

1. Those who experience not the favour of God, who can claim no title to it, but who wear out their days under a participation of the general bounty of Providence, ought to attend to the following considerations :—

(1.) Methinks God's common favours should engage your hearts to look after special love : if God be so

* Rom. vii. 24. Heb. xii. 1. 1 John iii. 3.

† 1 Pet. i. 8. Matt. xv. 23. Job xiii. 15. Psalm lxiii. 8.

good to the worst, surely he will be much better to the good; if he give such large crumbs to dogs, he hath better portions for children. Doth he make his sun to shine upon just and unjust promiscuously? * surely there is a brighter sun of his love shines on them that fear him. If heathens have rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, if he fill their hearts with food and gladness, then he will drop down soul-refreshing influences into the hearts of his dear people, and much more refresh their hearts with distinguishing love: and can you content yourselves with the former when better may be had? Can you be content with health, wealth, honours, and outward comforts, of which the great ones of the world have had as large a share as you desire, yet are now in hell? Rather protest with brave Luther, that you will not be put off with these things. Alas, what will gold and silver, fair houses, costly diet, great attendance, advantage you when your souls are sitting upon your lips, and your heart-strings are breaking, and you are summoned by death to appear in another world before the great Judge? Will these things procure you favour in that court? will the God of heaven favour you for being a person of quality, or of honour? No, no, sirs; you must be stripped of all these things, God will not respect the persons of men in that day, the things of this life will neither satisfy, sanctify, nor save. O think of those that with Naphthali have been satisfied with favour, and full of the outward blessings of the Lord, how they have left all, and that, in the midst of their heaven, and like fools they have gone down to hell. † Alas, sirs, the things of this world are neither suitable nor durable, it is only the favour of God that will stand you in stead in another world, and indeed that is the only good

* Matt. v. 45.

† Deut. xxxiii. 23. Jer. xvii. 11.

for a life to come.* Now, in God's favour there is eternal life, this is life eternal thus to know God, this is the tree of life, the bread of life, living waters:† nay, this favour of God will sweeten and season all outward favours, without which they will not be blessings, but curses. O that by these cords of love you might be drawn to God!‡ O think, is not God, Christ, his Spirit, pardon, peace of conscience, heaven, infinitely better than corn, cattle, meat, clothes, friends? Doth not God shame rebels with multiplicity of common favours? O that I might be one of his friends, that mercies might melt my heart; let me have such favour with God, that I may be owned in the great day.

(2.) Consider the wisest and holiest men on earth advise you to it, and take this course themselves; they counsel you to nothing but what they do themselves. Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, all the holy patriarchs, prophets, apostles, evangelists, martyrs, confessors, all that cloud of witnesses, that army of gracious souls that are now triumphing in glory, made this choice, and they have sped well; they scorned the favour of men, in comparison of God's, and God hath been found of them, they now enjoy the light of his countenance, and dwell in his immediate presence. O sirs, follow you them who through faith and patience do inherit the promises. Did David repent of his choice for preferring the light of God's countenance to men's corn, and wine, and oil? || Were not the Bereans more noble than others for welcoming the word?§ will not high-born spirits aspire after great things? and should not

* Job. xxxiv. 29. Luke xii. 21, 31.

† John xvii. 3. Rev. xxii. 2. John iv. 14.

‡ Mal. ii. 2. Hos. xi. 4. || Psalm iv. 6. § Acts xvii. 11.

you? Do not all the saints in heaven speak this language jointly—Follow us? would they not all unite in this exhortation—O seek God's face and favour? would not lost souls in hell, if sent to men on earth, urge this point, from their woful experience—O seek God's favour, or you will be for ever banished from it as we are? all God's ministers, your pious neighbours, your religious friends and relations, all dying persons, whose eyes are at last opened, will give you this counsel unanimously—If you love your souls, seek to obtain the favour of God. We poor ministers make it our work to study, to preach, to travel to you, to be in pain over you, and to pray for you, and what is all this for, but to persuade you to be reconciled to God,* if it be possible to bring you into the favour of God. O that we could accomplish this end! we should be sufficiently rewarded; what would we give to win your hearts to God? what joy would there be to the friends of the bridegroom,† if the match should be concluded, and your souls married to Christ? We would think all our labour well bestowed; nay, if we by our death could be instruments to bring you into God's favour; but what speak I of our death, Christ died to accomplish it, this cost blood, yea, the blood of God. O souls, shall nothing prevail with you? shall neither the example of the best men, nor the prayers, tears, entreaties or persuasions of your ministers or best friends, nor the blood of Christ, nor the blood of your own immortal souls prevail with you to look after God's favour? What then shall we say? we have delivered our message, if you be careless, your blood be upon your own heads.

(3.) Consider how intent the men of the world are to obtain the favour of men. “Many will entreat favour

* 2 Cor. v. 20.

† John iii. 29.

of the prince ;* and every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts," Prov. xix. 6. What running, what making friends, base compliance, and crouching according to the humours of superiors, to obtain their favour? If the poor tenant be out of favour with his rich landlord, what means doth he use to obtain it? And is the favour of the God of heaven of no value with you, of him who can make heaven and earth to tremble when once he is angry? of that God who can frown you into hell, and destroy you with a rebuke of his countenance. Alas, sirs, who would live out of his favour one hour? How darest thou eat and drink, and talk, and walk, and sleep, when thou art out of the favour of God? How knowest thou but God's wrath may wax hot against thee, and thou perish from the way? How canst thou say, that thou shalt be another night out of hell? If God be thine enemy, and angry at thee, he hath hourly advantage against thee : you will say, God forbid, I hope I am in God's favour. I answer, I wish it be so, but thou wast not born so, thou art by nature a child of wrath as well as others,† and the wrath of God abides still upon thee,‡ unless taken off by Jesus Christ ; thou hast no interest in Christ without faith, and thou hast no faith by nature, nor canst thou work it in thine own heart : but if faith be there, all other saving graces are radically there. And art thou indeed born again? art thou translated from death to life? hast thou experienced those painful feelings usually created in regeneration? All men have not faith, every soul is not new born ; the change is great, life and death depend upon it ; the heart is deceitful, most men are mistaken in this weighty case. Will the wordly wise be at uncertainties about their estates? have they not a mind to make all as sure as

* Prov. xxix. 26.

† Eph. ii. 3.

‡ John iii. 36.

they can? and doth not men's practice provoke or condemn thee? Suppose the men of the world obtain their ends—what is a prince's favour to God's? "Put not your trust in princes—blessed is the man that hath the God of Jacob for his help."* What if the base, man-pleasing flatterer get a little popular favour, how soon may men's hosannas be turned into "crucify him?" At what rate would the enamoured lover purchase the favour of his mistress, and when obtained, it may be, purchase nothing but sorrow? O take shame to yourselves that you take no more pains to obtain the favour of God; and now from henceforth let the kingdom of heaven suffer violence, and seek for that honour that cometh from God only: the matter is of infinite concernment, even as much as your souls are worth to all eternity.

(4.) There is yet a possibility of obtaining God's favour. Poor sinner, thou art yet alive, out of hell, thousands that were alive as thou art are past hope, they shall never have offers of grace more, no terms of accommodation shall ever be propounded to them, but they are banished for ever from the presence of the Lord, without hopes of ever seeing his face with comfort; this may be, must be thy case shortly, if thou obtain not God's favour here. The devils never had an offer of God's favour, those high favourites in the court of heaven, upon the first transgression were cast headlong into everlasting chains under darkness, reserved unto the judgment of the last day;† but thou hast heard the glad tidings of salvation by Jesus Christ the Saviour of the world; the good news concerns men, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, goodwill towards men."‡ It is to you, O men, that wisdom calls, and her voice is to the sons of men,|| it is to you

* Psal. cxlvi. 3—5. † Jude, 6. ‡ Luke ii. 14. || Prov. viii. 4.

that are alive, this day to whom the word of his salvation is sent; yet there is hope; yet for aught we know, the door is open: we are sent to living persons, the living, the living may praise the Lord, yet the Spirit of God is striving with you; yet God holds forth the golden sceptre, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation; he hath limited it to a day, this day of life; in vain shall you sue for favour when life is gone; the foolish virgins may stand long at the door and knock, and cry, "Lord, Lord, open to us;" when the door is shut, when the gulf is fixed, when death hath done its office, then there is no hope, no help, the disease will be incurable, your state wretched, your souls eternally undone; alas! alas for you! that ever you were born, if you would give thousands of pounds, yea, the whole world, were it yours to give, it would be in vain; all your wailings and piercing cries will not move God's heart to favour you, you must be for ever separated from his presence, and from the glory of his power, into endless, unintermitting, remediless torments, where the God of mercy will never cast a propitious eye upon you more; but as it were laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear comes upon you; for the scene of grace will be over, and justice now will act its part against rebellious and impenitent sinners for ever and ever.

You will say, but is there any hope? I fear I have sinned away the day of grace, and the interposition of God's Spirit; woe is me!

Ans. Neither thou, nor I, nor any creature breathing can tell that this is the case; still God is holding thy soul in life, and who knows but he may crown thee also with loving kindness and tender mercy? it may be, God hath spared thee for that end thus long: who knoweth but he will return and leave a blessing be-

hind him? * Even the poor Ninevites could thus argue, when they had no grounds of encouragement : Who can tell if God will turn away his fierce anger? † This is ground sufficient for a venture : it may be, ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger, ‡ or rather, it may be, he may turn away his anger, and be reconciled to you, and be favourable to your souls ; yea, be assured of it, if you be sincere in repenting and believing in Christ, you shall certainly be received into favour, there is no peradventure in it ; such as come to him he will in no wise cast out. || If the wicked forsake their way, and the ungodly their thoughts, and turn to the Lord, he will have mercy upon them, he will abundantly pardon ; § free grace will be magnified, their souls will be accepted, their sins will be pardoned, God hath said it and he will perform it. O believe not Satan, nor a perverse heart, against an infallible word of the faithful God. Say not as some forlorn miscreants invited to repent, there is no hope, no, for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go, ¶ as if he should say, it is in vain to move me to repent, I see my case is desperate, I lie under a curse and am given up to hardness of heart ; God will not pardon me, to hell I must go, I might as well take my pleasure in sinning, and be sentenced to misery for something, for to the devil I am going. Oh, horrible, dreadful frame ! God forbid that any should say, there is no hope at this rate ; there is certainly hope in Israel concerning this thing. ** Sin not as one desperate, forsake not thine own mercies, †† confess thy sin, repent and give glory to God ; there is mercy for the

* Joel ii. 14.

† Zeph. ii. 3.

§ Isa. lv. 7.

** Ezra x. 2.

† Jonah iii. 9.

|| John vi. 37.

¶ Jer. ii. 25. xviii. 12.

†† Jonah ii. 8.

chief of sinners, Paul is a pattern, Manasseh an instance, some of the Corinthians are lively examples. O kick not against his tender mercy, despise not the riches of his grace, scorn not his favours; let God's loving kindness lead thee to repentance, let hopes of acceptance be thy encouragement. When a pirate at sea, or rebel at land have no hopes of their prince's favour, they grow desperate; but a proclamation of gracious reception, especially a promise of preferment melts their hearts into submission; O that gospel offers might have the like efficacy upon your hearts! make a trial, put God to it, see whether he will be as good as his word; the report of his merciful nature, methinks should make you say as Benhadad's servants, "Behold now, we have heard that the king of Israel is a merciful king; let us put sackcloth upon our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel; peradventure he will save our lives;"* the life of our precious souls. You have even better assurance than they had, for the Lord our God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him, 2 Chron. xxx. 9. You will say I am very desirous of God's favour; but how shall I do to obtain it? what means must I use to obtain the favour of God? I answer, think not that you can procure God's favour, or purchase it with your endeavours, or work yourself into it by your duties or obedience; his love is free, yet he hath appointed ways for his poor creatures to use as means, which he prescribes for them, in order to the obtaining and enjoying of this mercy, and they are such as these briefly:—

1. Serious self-reflection. When God intends good to a person he engageth him to look into his own heart and state, to consider his ways, to commune with his

* 1 Kings xx. 31.

heart.* There are four inquiries I entreat you to make relative to yourselves.

(1.) Am I in God's favour or not? O I have great need to get this case of conscience clearly solved upon scripture grounds; every one doth not partake of this special favour of God, nor I by nature, for I am a child of wrath as I come into this world; am I changed, is my soul converted? what fruits of God's special love have I experienced in my soul! O that I could prove my work, prove my state whether I be in Christ, and Christ in me or not!† I must know, let the case be what it may, uncertainties will not serve my turn, loth I am to be deceived in a matter of so great moment.

(2.) What if I be out of God's favour? oh fearful state, woe is me, it had been better I had never been born; I am as sure to be lost as God is true, if I live and die so, and I may die this night, I know not but I may be in hell before morning; woe is me if I be not in God's favour, I am a bond-slave to Satan, an enemy to God and God to me, then all the creatures are my enemies, I am worse than the brutes, comparatively happy were I, if I could die as a dog or horse; woe is me, my soul is going into eternity, and I know not whither; but certain I am, I can never be happy in this world, or in another world, but by and in the favour of God.

(3.) How came it to pass, that my soul lost God's favour? what are the grounds of the quarrel? whence came this distance and difference betwixt the great God, and my poor soul? Adam was in favour, but lost it by sinning against God, in eating of the forbidden fruit; here the controversy first commenced, and I am guilty, and have ever since I was born followed that bad example, walked in the same steps, and so widened the difference; sin is only the make-bate be-

* Psal. cxix. 59.

† Gal. vi. 4. 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

tween God and my soul, it is that abominable thing that hides his face, provokes his wrath, and will separate my soul from God for ever.* Oh what a wretched being am I by reason of sin! oh that my soul could lay it deeply to heart, as that which hath done me so much injury!

(4.) What can I do to make God amends? will prayers, tears, labours, diligence in duties, resolution of obedience, pacify or please the Lord? will sufferings and sorrow quench the fire of God's anger? Oh, no, there is no created being whatsoever can make up this breach: if I could perfectly keep the law, and offend in no tittle, in thought, word or deed, that will not do it: performing a new duty, is no payment of an old debt; if I should lie in hell for ever, that endless punishment of a finite creature will not satisfy infinite justice, and therefore the utmost farthing cannot be paid; woe is me, is there no remedy? yes, the gospel propounds one, and that is Jesus Christ.

2. Sound-hearted faith in Christ. Whenever poor sinners are brought into God's favour, the next work God effects by his Spirit, is to produce a gospel faith, and this God doth,

(1.) By engaging careless sinners to a diligent attendance upon the word preached, for faith comes by hearing. † As this is a great and important duty, so it is a condition to which God hath made promises: "Hear, and your souls shall live." ‡ It is God's way and course into which he usually brings that sinner whom he is pleased to renew by his grace; be sure, then, that thou watch daily at his gates, waiting at the posts of his doors; || turn not thy back upon God's appointment; attend to the most plain and piercing ministry, it is the power of God unto salvation; who

* Isa. lix. 2. † Rom. x. 17. ‡ Isa. lv. 3. || Prov. viii. 34.

knows but God may send down his Spirit on the hearing of faith? * This is the method of his grace, first to reconcile men to his ordinances, and so by them to himself.

(2.) He makes the poor soul mind the word spoken. The sinner was wont to disregard truths as uninteresting or unimportant, but now conviction is fastened, and his heart being deeply affected, he cannot but confess that God is in his word of a truth. † O that at last you would consider, and receive with meekness the engrafted word as a word of conviction, that you would not despise prophesying, nor quench the Spirit! If God intend you good, he will pierce and break your hearts, and make you solicitous about salvation, and to cry out, What shall I do to be saved? ‡ Soul-concerns will be a leading consideration in your thoughts, and then you proceed on the road to further good.

(3.) He opens the eyes of men, to see further the nature of true justifying faith, that it is not such a dead, heartless thing as it is ordinarily taken to be; and that the faith which they imagined they had, is not the faith of God's elect; and that the soul hath not indeed a gospel faith, never did savingly believe, yet must necessarily have that faith, or be lost for ever. This is that which the Scripture assigns to be one of the works of the Spirit, John xvi. 8, 9; the Spirit shall convince the world of sin: what sin? because they believe not on me. O sirs, that you would study your unbelieving state! Think with thyself: the faith which will bring me off at the great day, must not be a faith of my own coining, but God's stamping; and alas, did I ever see the want of this? have I been convinced of the difficulty of believing and its necessity? what a sad thing will it be, if I go to the grave with a

* Rom. i. 16. Gal. iii. 2. † 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25. ‡ Acts ii. 37.

presumption, instead of a sound faith? I see, I see I have been deluded with Satan's brat, rather than the genuine fruit of God's Spirit: oh, what shall I do for a grain of saving faith?

(4.) He engages the poor guilty sinner to struggle with his own heart in the exercise of believing. O that I could believe! O that my heart were knit to Christ! fain would I accept of Christ, but I am beaten off, Satan and my own heart oppose it, I am like a man swimming against the stream, running uphill, I am just laying hold, but beat off again: I cry as the poor man in the gospel, "Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief:"* yet I will not give up the attempt, guilt makes me look on God as an enemy; yet I will say with Job, "Though he slay me, yet I will trust in him."† I have no where else to go, no course else to take, Christ I must have, or I am undone for ever—Christ's person, as God and man, in the effects of both estates, humiliation and exaltation, in all his offices, Prophet, Priest, King—Christ's merit to satisfy, and Spirit to sanctify—I will quit all things for him, it is the King's Son only that can bring my soul into favour with God: Prov. viii. 35, "Whoso findeth him findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord." If the Lord Jesus were mine, saith the soul, I question not but I should obtain favour with God, his blood is the atonement, he is the propitiation for sins, I must come to God by him, as the mystical ladder of Jacob. Alas, what shall I do? this heavy foot of mine will not step upon this ladder, this palsy hand will not lay hold on him; Lord, make my foot to move that I may come to Christ, strengthen my hand to receive him. I shall briefly touch the other means of enjoying God's favour, which are,

* Mark ix. 24.

† Job xiii. 15.

3. Self-resignation to God. Give up yourselves to God in covenant ; nothing can satisfy you but God himself, nothing can satisfy God but yourselves ; offer up *your bodies as a living sacrifice*, instead of the bodies of dead beasts under the law—*holy*, instead of carnal ordinances—*reasonable*, instead of irrational brutes, and this shall be acceptable to God, Rom. xii. 1. If you vow yourselves as a free-will offering to the Lord, he will graciously accept of your dedication, and smile upon you in Christ. Study his word, understand the terms of the covenant, accept voluntarily of those conditions, take his yoke upon you, put your necks under that easy yoke, and look upon it as your relief and pleasure, honour and ornament. First give up yourselves to the Lord, and then to his ministers by the will of God, then be ready to profess your subjection to the gospel of Christ ; * be ready to say I am the Lord's, call yourselves by the name of Jacob, subscribe with your hand to the Lord, and surname yourselves by the name of Israel, Isa. xlv. 5. Be ready to to give any pledges and testimonies of your fidelity, in troth-pledging to be the Lord's servants for ever ; give all the members of thy body, and faculties of thy soul to his service ; receive his words, hide his commandments with thee, incline thy ear to wisdom, apply thy heart to understanding, lift up thy voice, cry, seek for them as for silver, then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God ; † for the Scripture saith, " He that diligently seeketh good, procureth favour," Prov. xi. 27, that is, he that gives up himself to God in the way of his appointments, shall enjoy favour in the eyes of God and men : " A good man obtaineth favour of the Lord."—Prov. xii. 2. Make it thy business to walk with God, watch over

* 2 Cor. viii. 5. ix. 13.

† Prov. ii. 1—5.

thy heart, mortify lusts, exercise graces, perform duties, do all the good, avoid all the evil thou canst, and see what the effect will be: "Among the righteous there is favour."—Prov. xiv. 9. Favour towards the cause of God, favour in God towards them; for thou Lord wilt bless the righteous, with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield.

4. Earnest prayer and supplication. Psalm cxix. 58, "I entreated thy favour with my whole heart;" it is worth seeking, his favour merits our petitions, O plead hard for it, be not put off without it; let such language as this be in thy heart, or on thy lips—Lord, here I am a poor forlorn wretch, a guilty sinner; once the first man Adam in my nature was in thy favour, as one of the courtiers of heaven, he walked all the days of his innocency in the light of thy countenance; but alas, he fell, offended thy Majesty, proved a traitor, lost thy favour, and we in him, by breaking thy laws; and now the poor, wretched human race are banished from the palace of the prince, into a dungeon of darkness, to lie and perish in the shades of sin, guilt, wrath and endless despair; shouldst thou give me my due, thou mayest justly banish me amongst devils and damned spirits for ever: but, Lord, though I deserve no favour, Jesus Christ doth, he drank of the brook in the way, he made a passage to thyself by a new and living way; the sun of righteousness is risen, hath banished the shades of gloomy darkness caused by God's displeasure, hath brought life and immortality to light, hath removed frowns from the face of God, that poor sinners may behold him in the face of Jesus Christ; * through the tender mercy of our God, the day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of

* 2 Cor. iv. 6.

death, and to guide our feet in the way of peace.* Lord, smile upon me a poor sinner through thy Son, O for one beam of the sun of righteousness! Lord, grant that my soul may be accepted in the beloved; cast one eye of pity upon a poor sinner; let thy bowels of compassion yearn towards thy creature in misery, and give me some fruits of thy grace, make me amiable in thy sight, put thy comeliness upon me, and then take delight in me as thy child; and though thou canst see nothing in myself worthy acceptance, yet when thou hast adorned me with thy image and graces, thou wilt show favour to the work of thy hands; thou hast a love, not only of pity, but of complacency to some of thy creatures, and why not to me? Sun of righteousness, shine upon me, Lord, speak comfortably to thy servant; many are a terror to me, Satan affrights me, the world hates me, my conscience condemns me; but be not thou a terror to me, thou art my hope in the day of evil;† Lord, I am not fit to come into thy presence, for I am both polluted and guilty, yet have mercy upon me according to thy loving-kindness, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions, cast my sins behind thy back; but cast not me away from thy presence;‡ for thy servant, the son of David's sake, turn not away the face of thine anointed;§ he is thy beloved Son in whom thou art well pleased,¶ he well pleased with me through him; O favour me with the favour which thou bearest to thy people; visit me with thy salvation;¶¶ look upon me, and be merciful unto me as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name, Psalm cxix. 132.

* Luke i. 78, 79.

† Jer. xvii. 17.

‡ Psalm li. 1—11.

§ Psalm cxxxii. 10.

¶ Matt. iii. 17.

¶¶ Psalm cvi. 4.

CHAP. X.

THE SUBJECT CONCLUDED UNDER THE ARTICLE OF INSTRUCTION WITH AN ADDRESS TO THE OB- JECTS OF DIVINE FAVOUR.

THE second description of persons whom this doctrine instructs are saints, God's own people, the sincere professors of religion, that have a covenant title to, and interest in the favour of God, which indeed is the soul's life. Now concerning these, there are Christians of two sorts, for some *want*, and some *enjoy* a sense of divine favour.

I. Those that want God's favour, at least the sense of it; for as Davenant characterizes the favour of God, which he calls, "a bond of eternal good pleasure;"* this depends upon the discriminating grace of God: this bond is indissoluble, and cannot be weakened; for whom he loves once, he loves to the end. But there is also a love of complacency,† which includes the sense, enjoyment, and comfort of divine love, this love of intimate friendship, intercourse and familiarity, may be lost, and often is wanting, which hath made pious souls cry out, as though God had forsaken them, hid his face, dealt with them as if he were their enemy, or had cast them off for ever.

Here I shall endeavour to answer first, some objections; and secondly, some cases of conscience.

The objections are such as these,

Obj. Can I be in God's favour that am so unworthy of it? none so unfit.

Ans. 1. There is a twofold favour of God.

* Vinculum æternæ benevolentiae.

† Amor amicitiae.

(1.) Of benevolence, a love of good-will, from which he makes worthy.

(2.) A love of complacency and delight, whereby he owns, accepts and receives to his bosom, and embraces the soul that is so made worthy by sanctifying grace. All the world is unworthy of God's favour by nature; Rom. iii. 10, "There is none righteous, no, not one." Nor doth God set his love upon any, for any worthiness in them, but because he will love them; he draws arguments from his own bosom to do them good: but then when he hath graciously renewed their hearts by his Spirit, then he accounts them worthy in a gospel sense, and so favours them, that "they shall walk with him in white, for they are worthy," Rev. iii. 4.

2. None are by the Lord judged so worthy of special favours, as those that judge themselves most unworthy. Who had more of God's special favour than Abraham, who is called the friend of God, yet he accounts himself dust and ashes? Jacob was singularly regarded, as appears from visions of God, and answers of prayer which he had; yet looks on himself as less than the least of God's mercies. So David and Paul, that judged themselves as beasts, less than all saints, greatest of sinners; yet who had more revelations and manifestations of God's favour? Look through the Bible, and you will find that God's favour descends still into valleys, and that he honours those most that honour themselves least; see Psal. xxv. 14. Matt. viii. 8, 10. Luke i. 52, 53. xiv. 10, 11. James iv. 6.

Obj. But I am a depraved, polluted, sinful creature, a compound of vanity and wickedness: can God have any favour for such a one as I am?

Answ. 1. You must distinguish betwixt God's having respect to sin, and having respect to those in whom sin is. It is true, the righteous Lord loveth righteous-

ness, and hateth iniquity; yea, he abhorreth the wicked, he is of purer eyes than to behold evil; yet if God should have no love where corruption is, he would have no objects of favour among the children of men. He can distinguish (though men cannot, or will not) betwixt sinners and sinners, penitent and impenitent; he knows and regards his own image, though he hates and rejects Satan's; he favours his children, though all defiled, he respects his jewels in the mire; Christ's spouse is at the same time both black and comely. Consider the poor soul deformed with the relics of sin, O how unsightly it is! but look on the beginnings of grace in sincerity, O how desirable! Sin repented of, and abhorred, shall not hinder God's favour. Nay,

2. God hath greatest favour for him who has least favour for himself; he had most respect to penitent Job, who abhorred himself in dust and ashes. A self-loathing soul is a God-respected soul, Ezek. xvi. 63. God is most pacified, when the Christian's face is most ashamed, this self-confusion is both a fruit and evidence of God's favour; see Ezek. xx. 41, 43. xxxvi. 25—31. When thou hast least charity for thyself, God hath most for thee; when thou art most vile in thine own eyes, thou art most fair in his; this is no small mystery, grace vilifies a man to himself, magnifies him to God; at the same time when a man thinks himself the worst, God owns him as the best of men, and yet neither misseth, nor mistaketh in judging, for the soul's eyes being open, he sees his own vileness; but God who searcheth the heart, knows that by him, which he can scarce discern in himself, and through dissatisfaction with his corrupt heart will not believe is in him, so "He that shall humble himself, shall be exalted," Matt. xxiii. 12.

Obj. How can I have God's favour that feel it not,

cannot experience it, know it not, believe it not? surely, it is not possible a soul should be in God's favour, and not know it?

Ans. 1. You must distinguish betwixt God's favour to the soul, and a sense of it in the soul. David complains of broken bones, of God's hiding his face, withdrawing himself; so doth Job, Heman, yea, our Saviour. Divines distinguish betwixt salvation, and the joy of salvation. Psalm li. 12, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation:" the having of grace, and the feeling of grace are different things; a man in a swoon hath life, but is not sensible of it in some cases; God doth sometimes for wise ends suspend the manifestation of his favour from a gracious soul, as a father will do from his child, and as Joseph did from his brethren.

2. This variety of experience doth rather evidence God's favour, than the contrary; sick fits are incident only to men alive; they have child-like dispositions who understand the nature of God's withdrawals; it was a David that could say, "Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled." Genuine love is accompanied with many jealousies; ebbings and flowings are the attendants of sea-faring men; uphill and down is the road to heaven. Think not to be always dandled in God's arms, or laid in his bosom; remember you are on earth, not in heaven; your sun may be often under a cloud, your appetites must not be always gratified with dainties. It is natural for God's children in some cases to question God's love: merely formal presumers will hardly be brought to question God's favour, are ordinarily in one uniform, settled state, and go on dreaming in a fool's paradise; or if they should question it, they silence a clamorous conscience with worldly salvos, or phantastic delusions.

Obj. But alas, how can I think that God favours

me, when I cannot love him? Is not God's love seconded with our love to him, as the genuine reflection of his lovely rays? 1 John iv. 19.

Ans. 1. You must distinguish betwixt the direct and the reflex actings of grace. It is one thing to exercise grace, another to know that this is indeed the genuine exercise of sincere grace: the grace of love may be hid in the Christian's heart, as well as God's favour hid under a cloud. Spiritual life may be hid, Col. iii. 3, even from the Christian's own view, as well as from others' discovery; desertions, temptations, and corruptions may darken and damp a pious soul's evidences of grace.

2. But look again and rake up the ashes, and see if thou canst not find some spark of love; feel thy pulse again, and feel it steadily, and see if it beat not truly, though faintly; thou wouldst lie still as a stone, if the the cords of love did not draw thee; thou wouldst be as dead as a corpse, if the sun of God's favour did not quicken thee. What? is not God's love shed abroad in thy heart? * canst thou not love him, though absent, though unseen? † But I shall wave this, as having spoken to it before.

Other objections might be mentioned, (as indeed there is no end of a doubting soul's querulous complaints, when Satan raiseth hard thoughts of God in us) such as this: if God hath any favour for me, why doth he not take off this affliction, or bestow upon me this or that good which I want? I answer, it is because his favour is towards thee; God may deny a mercy to some in favour, and give a mercy to others in wrath; affliction is adopted to be a covenant mercy, Psalm lxxxix. 32. But God may give wicked men their own desire, Psalm lxxviii. 29; and mingle that

* Rom. v. 5.

† 1 Pet. i. 8.

gift with wrath, verse 31. The Father knows what is good for the child better than the child himself, and if he give in favour, he will give every good thing, Psalm lxxxiv. 11. A man in a fever would have strong drink, which would increase his disease, but his attendant is wise: God is a faithful keeper, a merciful preserver; it is a favour that God will rather deny than gratify our fond desires in some things; he often doth us good against our wills.

O but, saith the soul, if God favour me, why doth he suffer me to be harassed with such violent temptations and raging corruptions? I answer, it is neither want of power or love in God towards his children, but for wise ends, even to make them humble and self-denying, and to lead them to see a daily need of recourse to Christ, to induce them to maintain grace in lively exercise, to animate them to keep up spiritual warfare, and finally to make the conquest more glorious, death more desirable, and heaven more welcome.

2. Cases of conscience are such as these:—

Query, Doth not faith consist in the assurance of God's favour? I have heard some say so, and if so, I have no faith.

Answ. That is a mistake: assurance of God's favour is not of the essence, but a blessed effect of faith; hence it is called the assurance of faith, Heb. x. 22. There may be sincere faith without it, as many Scripture instances demonstrate: Psalm xxii. 1. lxxxviii. 1, 14. Isa. i. 10. Sealing comes after believing, Eph. i. 13; for faith consists in an assent of the mind to gospel revelations, and a consent of the will to take Christ upon his own terms, as he is held forth in the gospel, 1 Tim. i. 15. John i. 12.

Qu. But how can a soul exercise faith on God, that

wants assurance of God's favour? what ground hath he for faith?

Ans. We may exercise faith without a particular assurance: Job xiii. 15. Psalm xiii. 1, 5. cxliii. 7, 8. So the woman of Canaan did, Matt. xv. 22—28. Because the ground of faith is not providences, but promises; not sense and feeling of God's special love at present, but secret confidence built upon a revelation of God's power and willingness to save, and his gracious conduct towards others: so that a person knowing his misery and necessity, and understanding God's mercy and faithfulness, ventures himself on God in the way of believing.

Qu. What may be the reason why the Lord sometimes withdraws the sense of his favour from his children?

Ans. God hath many wise and gracious ends in this dispensation. A skilful physician gives vomits and purgatives, to work out bad humours, and to create a more healthful constitution of body: God's children oft grow careless and irregular, and provoke God to withdraw the sense of his love and favour, in consequence of which he inflicts this darkness as their punishment. This was David's case here, God punished his carnal confidence by withdrawment, Psalm xxx. 7; so Isa. lvii. 17. I might mention many gracious purposes that God hath in hiding his face, for promoting the good of his children, as,

1. To awaken them out of drowsiness and security, Cant. v. 3, 4.

2. To humble their hearts, and prevent pride, 2 Cor. xii. 7.

3. To prepare them for comfort, 2 Cor. i. 5. In nature God works by contraries, so in grace he brings to heaven by the confines of hell.

4. To wean their hearts from the world, to which they are too much attached, Psalm cxix. 36. Letters and tokens of love are oft intercepted, that we may love and long more for home.

5. To raise their hearts to a higher esteem of God's favour, quickening their diligence in seeking him, promoting their care and endeavour to hold him fast, Cant. iii. 1—5.

6. That after these sad shakings, their hearts may be more fully settled and established upon better grounds, 1 Pet. v. 10.

7. To teach them to pity, pray for, and relieve others in such a state of desertion, Heb. ii. 17, 18.

Another case of conscience is, whether assurance of God's favour can be attained, and in what way?

Ans. This is a grave and extensive subject, I can but advert to it. There is no question but assurance of God's favour is attainable, and it is a fault in those that think it is presumption to desire or seek for it. It is commanded, 2 Pet. i. 10. It is promised, Ezek. xxxiv. 30. John xiv. 21. It hath been attained, Rom. viii. 15, 16. 1 John iv. 16. The way to obtain it is not peculiar or restricted to some individuals, but common to all believers in all ages; for it is inferred by a practical syllogism, thus: He that sincerely believes, repents, and loves God, is in God's favour; but, saith the soul, I sincerely believe, repent, and love God, therefore I am in God's favour. The *major* is a Scripture assertion, therefore an infallible truth: John iii. 15. Acts iii. 19. 1 John iii. 14, 18, 19. The *minor* is a Christian's own experience, the workings of grace in his heart: 2 Cor. iii. 17. Heb. x. 34. The consequence is very clearly drawn from the premises; make out these, and the conclusion will follow evidently; therefore I am in God's favour, and shall be saved.

Qu. Why then do so few attain assurance of God's favour?

Answ. It is difficult though possible, and few will be at the pains to use God's appointed means, or stay God's leisure for obtaining assurance; many are ignorant, and know not how to set about self-trial; others melancholy, and are not able to distinguish aright, or to make rational deductions; many blur their evidences by sinning; others have a defect of faith, or too much prevalence of unbelief in their hearts, are surprised with slavish fears and jealousies, and are apt to think it is too good news to be true; others give way to the world, which interposeth between the sun of God's favour and their souls; Satan buffets some with sad temptations, and God leaves others under desertion for gracious ends. For we must (with most Divines) distinguish betwixt a Christian's gradual assurance of God's favour, which is upon a discovery of gracious habits in the soul and actings of grace, and that which is intuitive, that is, which flows from the more immediate shinings of God's face, or sealings of his Spirit, wherein God as a free agent vouchsafes or suspends these tokens of love, as he sees good; and though it be a truth that God must shine upon the graces of his Spirit in our hearts, or we cannot have assurance of his favour, yet usually the reason of our want of assurance is our own negligence, not using or carelessly using the means for attaining thereof. If you ask me, what are the ordinary means that a Christian must use for obtaining assurance of God's favour, I shall but mention four.

1. Diligent attendance upon God's ordinances, and looking up to God in all his appointments, such as hearing the word, Psal. lxxxix. 15; religious conference, Cant. iii. 3. 1 Thess. v. 14; earnest prayer, John xvi.

24. Only use these conscientiously and constantly, and you will see the happy effect.

2. Solemn self-examination. It may be there is something amiss in your hearts and lives, for which God withdraws; O search and find it out, mourn over it, procure a pardon of it, and a thorough reconciliation, Job xiii. 23, 24. God loves to smile upon humbled souls, James iv. 6, 10. 2 Cor. vii. 6. Isa. lvii. 15.

3. Reflection on experience, Psalm lxxvii. 5, 10. cxlv. 4, 5. It becomes Christians to keep a register of God's dealings with their hearts, and when they are in the dark to look it over, Psal. xlii. 6; and the reason is, because if ever thou wast in God's favour, thou art still in his favour; see John xiii. 1. That is a remarkable text Jer. xxxi. 3, which some render thus, "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me," that is, say they, it is true, God formerly made many gracious discoveries of himself to our ancestors, but now he hideth himself, and hath forsaken us; but, saith the Lord, I have loved thee with an everlasting love, as if he had said, it is not transient or temporal favour, but from, and to all eternity; therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee.

4. Walking in ways well-pleasing to God, conformity of life and heart to God's will, a constant care to please God, and fear to offend him, are both means and evidence of God's favour, Psalm xxv. 14. Mal. iv. 2. Psal. lxxxv. 9. It is impossible you should have a right assurance of God's favour, if you favour any sin; yea, let a godly man yield to sin, and presently the evidence of God's favour is lost and withdrawn; for sin separates betwixt a people and their God, Isa. lix. 2. This interposes as a thick mist to hide his face from us; if your hearts grow secure and worldly, sitting loose from God, letting down your watch, or remitting

diligence in duty; presently, if you be sensible, you will find God withdrawing the light of his countenance from your souls; for God will not manifest himself to those that make not conscience of close and holy walking.

II. Something I should say to those that do enjoy the sweet sunshine of God's favour, and feel the sense of it in their hearts. I shall but briefly advert to your duty.

1. Be very thankful, and praise God for causing his candle to shine upon thy head, for all men have not God's special favour; thou hast no right to it by nature; thou didst not deserve it for any thing thou hast done; thou hast often forfeited it; many thousands go out of God's blessings into the warm sun, and willingly leave our Father's table to feed upon husks; most of the world are willingly put off with a few scraps of worldly enjoyments. Luther calls the whole Turkish empire but a crumb cast to dogs. O but this is the children's bread, bless God, and say as Mephibosheth to David, Who am I that the Lord should look on such a dead dog as I am? what shall I render to the Lord for this benefit? O for a thankful heart; Lord, pardon my base ingratitude.

2. Walk worthy of this privilege, lay up experiences of God's favour, as Mary laid up the angel's sayings in her heart, or as friends lay up tokens of love carefully, we use to preserve deeds of moment locked up, seals are put under special protection that they may not be broken. O look well to evidences of God's love, they may stand you in stead, as Tamar produced her pledges to Judah. O abuse not God's favour by sinning, turn not his grace into licentiousness; Hanun's abuse of David's kindness, you know, brought forth a war, and truly God often reckons the abuse of his favour as a

matter of controversy against Israel of old, see Jer. ii. 2, 5, 9. Mic. vi. 2—5; and indeed the abusing of his love goes to his very heart. Act consistently with your obligations to him, seeking to please, and being afraid to offend him, charging yourselves and others that you beware of interrupting your comfort, or disturbing the repose he hath in you, Cant. ii. 7. Observe you are in the greatest danger of falls immediately after the receipt of the sweetest tokens of favour, therefore be watchful daily to maintain a holy jealousy over your hearts, that you sin not, and that you provoke not God's displeasure.

3. Improve God's favour for the good of others; produce instances thereof, saying, "Come all ye that fear God, and I will shew you what he hath done for my soul," Psal. lxvi. 16. Speak to your children, servants, neighbours and companions, and urge them to taste and see how good the Lord is; recommend his service from your own experience; tell them how sweet you have found the light of God's countenance, how attainable and endearing God's favour is, and by what means they may get a share therein; but above all, plead for this to all about you. A godly man being a long time in a secret place in prayer, when he came forth with an unusual cheerfulness, he told some around him that he had that day obtained mercy for himself and all his family, which was accordingly true, for all his children proved truly pious; and indeed it is a fit season to pour out our hearts before God, that others may experience mercy, as Abraham did, "O that Ishmael may live in thy sight." For a soul that is in favour with God can prevail much with him; a Moses intimate with God in the mount, may be a powerful advocate to stand in the gap and prevail with God, that favour may be shown to the church. The famous Mr. Welsh, a

godly Scotch minister, rose one night, and went into the garden ; his wife following him, heard a voice fervently uttered with sobs and tears, saying, "O God, wilt thou not give me Scotland? wilt thou not give me Scotland?" Afterwards he told her, "I have endured a great fight for Scotland this night, and hardly could I prevail to have a remnant reserved, yet he will be gracious." This, this is the season in which you must ply the throne of grace for favour to others. And O what a privilege is it to have our cases upon the hearts of such as are thus intimate with the Lord, as one said, when it shall be thus with thee, then remember me. *

4. Long and hope for heaven. Let the sweet sense and favour of God here, make your souls restless till you advance to the full and final fruition of it in glory; let these tastes make you long for a full draught ; let these rivers or streams lead you to the spring; let these beams attract you to the glorious Sun of righteousness, to him in whose presence is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore. In the morning of the resurrection when you awake, you shall be satisfied with his image, you will be content to go into your Father's palace. You are in a corner of heaven indeed, when you are solacing your souls in the divine embraces, but methinks it should be irksome to depart from so blessed and beautiful a place, and come down again into this loathsome dungeon of the world. However, be looking for, and hasting to the coming of our dear Lord, and trust him till then, and believe that he will preserve you to his heavenly kingdom. Some of God's servants have breathed their last in the sense and views thereof. There is a remarkable story of Mr. Robert Bruce, a very holy re-

* Cum sic tibi fuerit, memento mei.

verend minister, when he was very old, coming to breakfast one morning, and having eaten an egg, he said to his daughter, "I am yet hungry, bring me another egg;" he continuing in a deep meditation, said, "Hold, daughter, hold, my master calls," and his sight failing him, when he had called for a Bible, he bade them turn to the eighth of the Romans, saying, "Put my finger to ver. 38, *For I am persuaded that neither death*"—now saith he, "Is my finger upon those words?" when they told him it was, without any more he said, "Now God be with you my children, I have breakfasted with you, and shall sup with my Lord Jesus Christ this night," and so gave up the ghost. Which delightful death makes me think of the notion of some Jewish Rabbies upon Deut. xxxiv. 5, "Moses died—according to the word of the Lord," so we read it, but in Hebrew it is, "At the mouth of Jehovah," they say, at the kiss of the Lord;* those sweet embraces brought him to eternal embraces of the Lord. He is there called the servant of the Lord, not before, saith Aben Ezra; by this title is expressed the excellence of that estate at which he arrived, for the servant is still conversant with his master, enters into his secret conclave, is still ready at his beck, so did Moses freely yield himself to go to God at his call, and so should we. They have a saying, "That the righteous are greater in death than in life."† When the believer is separated from the body, he ministers to God perfectly in the heights of heaven, and he is also called God's servant at death, because he now goes to receive the full reward of his work in another world, as a faithful servant. In both these respects God's servants are privileged, for our Saviour saith, John xii. 26, "Where

* Ad osculum Jehovahæ.

† Majores sunt justi in morte quam in vitâ.

I am there shall also my servants be, and if any man serve me, him will my Father honour." And O the blessed reward of this service, Col. iii. 24, "Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance, for ye serve the Lord Christ." O faithful rewarder! O bountiful benefactor!

I shall close all with the following meditation, by way of paraphrase, on the text which I have endeavoured to explain and enforce through the whole of this treatise.*

The divine word informs me, and my own experience bears witness to the delightful truth, that "in his favour there is life." To this I can set my seal; so that what many others do but read, I, a poor sinful worm, am made to feel. Were I denied the sweet enjoyment of his favour, my heart would be pained; I should faint and languish. Had I never tasted the precious benefit, I should never have known how good it is. But I know in whom I have believed; I know whom I have loved; and how do I long that my weary soul may rest in the bosom of his love! His benignity is better than life. I long to have a full draught of his love, or rather, to be overwhelmed in this unbounded ocean.

Absence from him, whose favour has won my heart, is the sharpest pain I now feel. O that the veil, which hides from me the bright vision of his face, were but once removed! I long to see him as he is. Since his love has warmed my once-frozen breast, my heart is not my own; I have given my warmest affections to him, and cannot forbear to cry, "When shall I come, and appear before God!"

* Here the Editor takes the liberty of substituting Dr. Fawcett's paraphrase instead of the original. This however is the only instance in which he has ventured to take such liberty with his Author.

Farewell, delusive world ; my heart glows with an ardour which nothing beneath the sun could possibly inspire. The brightest things below the skies have no charms for me, in comparison with him who is the chief among ten thousands, and altogether lovely. The favour of the great, the riches of the wealthy, and the delights of the vain, are mean and despicable things. When the light of God's countenance is lifted up upon me, I can look on this captivating world with disdain, and deem the mightiest monarch poor, who knows nothing of the favour of the King of kings.

How am I indebted to the riches of infinite love ! The merciful Redeemer saw me, all wretched and forlorn, a helpless orphan, cast out in the open field, polluted in mine own blood, to the loathing of my person ; he pitied my helpless case, took me up in his arms, cherished me in his bosom, washed me from my filthiness, adorned me with his comeliness, and said unto me, " I have loved thee with an everlasting love." O how great is his mercy ! I am now emboldened to claim a personal interest in his favour, and to say, " My beloved is mine, and I am his." His love is absolutely free. There was enough in me to provoke his eternal abhorrence ; but he hath mercy on whom, and because he will have mercy.

Assist me, ye divine intelligences, ye angels of light, assist me to admire and adore his love. Teach me, in strains like your own, to celebrate the height, the depth, the length and the breadth of redeeming grace.

The tokens of divine favour are sweet beyond expression. They banish the fears and inquietudes of the pained heart ; they alleviate the crosses and afflictions of life, and brighten the horrors of death and the grave. Blest with the smiles of his face, who loved me, and gave himself for me, I can cheerfully submit

to every chastisement of his hand; knowing that whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. Welcome disease, welcome every pain, which indicates the speedy dissolution of this tabernacle, and portends the hour of my release from the burdens of the flesh. These breaches in the walls of my prison-house admit the rays of celestial light, and assure me, that my longing soul shall speedily gain her happy dismissal, and fly to the bosom of her Saviour. Go on, O Lord, to accomplish in me all the good pleasure of thy goodness, and the work of faith with power. Let thy light shine brighter and brighter, unto the perfect day. Then farewell groans, and tears, and complaints; farewell darkness and eclipses of the Sun of righteousness; farewell glimmering hopes and gloomy fears; faith itself will then be turned into sight, and hope into everlasting fruition. Welcome ye pleasures which flow at God's right hand for evermore! When I partake of these I shall know, that "IN HIS FAVOUR IS LIFE!"