

THE  
BEST ENTAIL;  
OR,  
DYING PARENTS' LIVING HOPES  
FOR THEIR  
SURVIVING CHILDREN,  
GROUNDED UPON THE COVENANT OF GOD'S GRACE,  
WITH  
BELIEVERS AND THEIR SEED.

THE  
DEDICATION.

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*To the Right Honourable Philip Lord Wharton.*

MY LORD,

THE concernedness your lordship hath for the worthy branches of your noble family, is demonstrated to all whom you esteem friends, by the constant solicitation with which you close your letters, *Remember me and my family in your prayers*, by which your lordship at once testifies your natural affection and true piety; your earnest desire of the best good, and the means by which that must come from God, even on the wings of believing prayer. Your lordship's request hath the force of a command; the obligations laid upon many hundreds both of ministers and people, extort from us, in point of gratitude, both many thanksgivings to God, and renewed supplications for your lordship, that the blessing of Abraham may successively continue in your noble family, that it may be blessed, and be a blessing. O happy family! where the precious pearl of covenant grace enamels the gold ring of worldly honour! It is true, the divine oracles say, not many mighty, not many noble are called. A good lady added, blessed be God, that it saith, not, *not any*. Once at least God will have an emperor, *a Constantine* saved. Augustine saith, a poor Lazarus is laid in rich Abraham's bosom. Sacred writ records a noble Theophilus, and an elect lady. And ecclesiastical history furnisheth us with a large catalogue of illustrious members of noble families, attached to the house of the Lord, which like fixed stars of the first magnitude, have shone bright in their proper orbits, and shed a heavenly influence among their inferiors. In which rank God hath placed your honour; whose morning star of early piety con-

tinues still shining bright to a good old age, and hath cast many resplendent beams of favour upon indigent persons, and spread the savour of divine knowledge amongst the ignorant; for which the loins of the poor, and souls of the instructed will bless you in this, and the other world. I doubt not, my lord, but your gracious spirit echoes to the dying speech of holy David, to whom a succession of piety in his seed was more eligible than of royalty and large revenues. What can be compared to this one comprehensive promise, *I will be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee*: yet this is the rich privilege of God's covenanted servants. Mines of gold, mountains of pearl, can bear no proportion to this one word, *my God*; This is light in darkness, life in death, a heaven in the midst of hell. The sense of this is the only cordial to the fainting spirits of God's afflicted children. Yea, saith one, if but one little drop of divine love, should fall into a lost soul in hell, it would sweeten or swallow up the bitter torments. And next to the privilege of God's being our God, his being our children's God claims the pre-eminence. For parents' anxious thoughts run out for their children's well being in this and another world. If God help us to own him, he will not forsake us or ours. It is true grace comes not by succession, yet oft in succession. The line of covenant love reacheth to many generations; and the more numerous pious predecessors are, the greater is the shower of blessings. So a learned man reads that paternal benediction of Jacob to Joseph, "The blessings of thy father are strong with the blessings of my progenitors;"\* as the more waters run into one channel, the deeper it grows. Your lordship then may hope for multiplied and accumulative blessings on your noble progeny, if that be sound divinity, which was a maxim amongst the Jewish rabbies, that the divine glory rests on noble stems: however beams of love reflect with greatest lustre when descending on honourable personages. Therefore should we pray most ardently, for those of highest rank, as having the greatest capacity of doing most good; and a pious man, or minister, must not only with David, "serve his own generation by the will of God,"† but with the blessed apostle Peter, "endeavour that posterity may be able after their

\* Gen. xlix. 26

† Acts xiii. 36.

decease to have divine truths always in remembrance."\* This, my lord, hath been the great care of your honour; and as natural motions have more velocity towards the end, so the nearer your lordship approacheth to your centre and haven, the more sedulous and active are you to lay a foundation for religion in future generations; thereby also laying up in store for yourself a good foundation for the time to come, so laying hold on eternal life.† For the accomplishing of this great purpose, a poor inconsiderable worm casts his mite into my Lord's treasury, and prostrates himself at your lordship's feet, in this dedication, in testimony of my sincere gratitude for your unparalleled kindness and condescension to so humble a person. Withal recommending this small Treatise to your lordship, to encourage your heart, and strengthen your hands in God, under the painful breaches in your noble family; venturing it into a critical world under your lordship's auspicious name; not doubting a pardon for this boldness, and a candid acceptance; following it with my poor prayers, that it may obtain its desired success among the rising generation, and may excite parents to improve this blessed covenant; hoping that when your lordship hath filled up your days with grace, and your soul hath been transplanted into the celestial paradise; some of your seed will rise up in your room as plants of renown, to bear your image and name, and follow your gracious example while sun and moon endure; which is the daily prayer of,

My Lord,

Your humble and devoted servant,

OLIVER HEYWOOD.

\* 2 Pet. i. 15.

† 1 Tim. vi. 19.

THE  
PREFACE.

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THERE is nothing in the world (I am very confident) lies so near the heart of a gracious Christian, next to the glory of God and his own soul's eternal happiness, as the spiritual good of his dear children ; nature binds him to love his own : Christianity regulates and spiritualizes this love : fondness is not true love, but faithfulness : love to their bodies without love to their souls is nothing but animal attachment : it is like a doting on the casket, and throwing away the jewel, the soul is the man, the unseen part is the best part : where the soul is lodged, when parted from the body, there must the body lodge, in heaven or hell : oh that men understood and well digested this ! surely they would not so unweariedly toil and exhaust themselves to get estates for their children, and take no care of their precious souls, and know not when they die, whether " he that comes after them will be a wise man or a fool :\*" if he be a wise man, a little will serve him, with God's blessing : if wicked, he puts a sword into the hand of a fool to do himself and others a greater mischief. Oh, how much better is it for their own peace and their children's profit to plead the covenant of grace, to instruct, correct, admonish, counsel, comfort, and encourage their children in the ways of God, and use their utmost endeavour to make them God's children : an ancient thus writes : " God commands parents to hoard up discipline, not money for their children, things of a perpetual not perishing nature."† What a base and sordid thing is it to prefer a hog to a son ! to provide for an animal and cast out a child ! and yet most

\* Eccl. ii. 19.

† Disciplinam parentes Deus jubet thesaurizare filiis, non pecuniam, perennia præcipit non peritura conferre.—*Sabrian ad Eccles. cath. lib. 3. p. 441.*



parents bestow more care on their cattle than on their children's souls: they give their children nature, but deny them nurture: yea, they propagate corruption to them, but do not travail over them till Christ be formed in them: they glory in being fathers of their flesh, but cry not to the Father of spirits for the best, the spiritual life of their children. They promise at their baptism, to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, but know not what that meaneth, and have no heart to learn, that they may teach. Oh what account will these perjured parents give another day? Remember, God will call you to account, what answer will you give, when he shall say? "Where is the child's soul, that I committed to thy trust? what care hast thou taken of it? where are thy tears, prayers, groans, yearnings of bowels for thine own? didst thou not know that thy child had a soul? that its soul was polluted with sin? that it must be born again not only of water but of the Spirit; or it could not be saved? that though I was to be the efficient cause, yet thou must be the instrument to begin and carry on this work, and hast thou done any thing in this concern by faithful endeavours? or hast thou earnestly desired me to do that for thy child which thou couldst not? thou knowest thou hast done neither, and therefore thy child's blood shall be required at thy hands." What apology wilt thou then make for thyself? Dost thou think to come off by saying, I sent him to school to learn, or to the minister to be catechised? this is more than some will do, but is this all? is not paternal care thy personal duty? wast not thou charged with thy child's soul? may not God justly blast other teachers' pains as a punishment of thy negligence? and doth not thy bad example at home counteract all that others teach them? Woe, woe, to such wicked parents!

In the name of God I charge you, as you will not have your children accuse and reprobate you in hell for ever, concern yourselves deeply about their everlasting state; think, they can never do well, if they do not well for another world: they will never be dutiful to you, till they be obedient to God: train them up for God, and you consult at once God's glory, the good of the church and commonwealth, your own comfort, and their eternal felicity: true grace qualifies persons for every con-

dition for he that is really good will be relatively good—a good king or subject, father or child, master or servant. Heathens knew this, that the way to form persons into a due mould of civil subjection is a literary and virtuous education : thus the king of Babylon conquering Judah ordered the king's seed and princes to be trained up in the learning of the Chaldeans :\* and our own history tells us, that when the Romans conquered this island, Julius Agricola brought noblemen's sons to Rome, and caused them to be educated in liberal sciences, whereby they gradually tamed the furious temper of the Britons, so that the inhabitants here became of gentle spirit, and peaceable subjects : much more will Christianity and true piety bring persons into regular habits : it expels barbarity and produceth civility, hospitality, frugality, and yet a discreet liberality : a divine benediction is entailed upon sincere religion : “ Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.”† If your children be pious they will be fit for any thing, and all things will conduce to their good.

And you, O children, suffer a word of exhortation from one who hath had experience of childhood, youth, and ripèr age, and is arrived at old age, who hath been a teacher of others above forty years, and may say to you as Augustus did to his mutinous army, “ Hear me, young men, whom once when young old men heard and obeyed.”‡ God forbid you should be headstrong sons of Belial, yokeless, and so run headlong into the pit of destruction. Be not like the wild ass's colt, break not through parents' tears, prayers, counsels, and commands, to make your way to hell : alas ! that any young persons should desperately withstand the persuasions of ministers, the suggestions of the Spirit, the checks of their own consciences, the sad warnings of their undone companions, and the rod of God on their own backs, and haste through all these to the pit, without ever stopping till they be swallowed up in that infernal lake which burns with fire and brimstone : you will say, what will you have us to do ? I answer, act as rational creatures, enure yourselves to solemn consideration : consider that you are creatures of a

\* Dan. i. 3. 4.

† 1 Tim. iv. 8.

‡ Audite me, juvenes, quem juvenem senes audierunt.

higher rank than brutes, that you have never-dying souls, that God made you to glorify and enjoy him; that he hath given you a rule to act by, in order to reach another state in another world, that sin hath depraved your natures, hath deprived you of God's image, and brought you under his curse; that Christ came to redeem sinners, that saving faith doth interest souls in Christ, and that faith is the gift of God; that in your baptism you were engaged to forsake the world, the flesh, and the devil; consider your sins since you were baptized, confess them to God; review and renew your baptismal vow, actually renounce all other claimants, and give up yourselves to the Lord, understandingly, deliberately, universally, and perpetually; regard Jesus Christ, as the way, the truth, and the life; espouse his interests; associate with God's people; obey all his commands; attend on him in all his ordinances; be sure you be sincere; exercise every grace; aim at perfection; keep a constant watch over your hearts and ways, maintaining a daily warfare against all spiritual enemies; prepare for death; and consider where you must lodge when the king of terrors lays his cold hand of arrest upon you; and make your accounts straight against that great reckoning day; especially be sure you put on Christ, and employ him as your advocate, that he may answer for you at that day.

These things I do but touch; for my great design is, to quicken and encourage parents on the behalf of their posterity; some of whom are left to themselves by the Lord to go astray, which occasioned Mr. Laurence's excellent *Treatise on Parents' Groans*; nor is it his case only, but many others also, some particular instances are fresh in our memory, which have brought some pious parents' grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. Some well known servants of God having never seen any hopeful symptoms of grace upon some or any of their children in their life time, and having on this account sad temptations to question the truth of God in his covenant; yet even in the very pangs of death they have embraced and clasped hard this blessed word, dying in the hopes of its efficacy for themselves and theirs; and the subject being recommended to me, was accordingly treated in a funeral discourse, which upon request, I was willing to transcribe, for the encouragement of poor afflicted



parents, who are bowed down with heart grief for their offending children. I confess the subject is novel and singular, and such as I have not seen any treatise upon : and having walked in an untrodden path, I hope I may obtain a pardon from God and man for any erratic movement, whilst the tendency is God's glory and the good of souls.

I hope none will reject this Treatise, because it seems a limited subject, as if they were not concerned in it, for as it is handled it extends to all, parents and children ; yea such as have no children, are dealt with in this small Treatise, for their instruction and consolation. Such as it is I commend to believing, praying parents, following it with my poor prayers, that all the children of the covenant, may be covenanted souls, and that parents may be comforted with the grace of God in their posterity, and both may meet in glory ; and if any reap and receive any advantage, I have my reward, and do humbly beg the incessant prayers of all that can pray,

For the poor servant of Christ and the church,

OLIVER HEYWOOD.

# DYING PARENTS' LIVING HOPES

FOR THEIR

## SURVIVING CHILDREN.

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2 SAM. XXIII. 5.

*Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.*

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## CHAP. I.

### INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS.

THESE words contain dying David's living comfort. The covenant was the only cordial to his fainting spirits; when the world looked dark about him, here light ariseth out of obscurity; just as it was with Oecolampadius when dying, and putting his hand on his breast, he cried, here is light enough:\* so like David, a believer looking above, sees all good in the covenant; looking within, he sees the counterpart of it, and saith, here, here alone is light, by his light I walk through darkness.† This shall be my *vade mecum*, my companion through this pilgrimage of the world, and this only shall be my *viaticum*, my support and supply when I pass through the valley of

\* Hic sat lucis.

† Job xxix. 3.

the shadow of death. Farewell, empty, polluted world, welcome the immediate presence of my covenant God ; I am going from a prison to a palace, from sorrow to solace, from sin to the sweet enjoyment of God ; and the only foundation of my hopes is this gospel covenant. A poor dying miser, ready to breathe out his unhappy soul, got a Jacobus piece of gold, and clapped it to his breast saying, " I will die with this cordial at my heart ;" but at last plucked it away saying, " it will not do, alas it will not do." No ; gold itself is no cordial, it cannot disarm death, nor arm against it, it loses its virtue ; nothing but God's covenant will stand in stead ; the dying child of God is like the standard-bearer, who when the battle was lost, wrapped himself in his colours and therein was safe, he marches boldly through armies of enemies, uninjured into his father's palace. O happy soul that enjoys and improves this covenant !

The context tells us, that these are the last words of David, not absolutely as though he breathed his last, after he had uttered them (for there were several expressions and transactions after) but comparatively, they were uttered towards the latter end of David's life. Now the dying words of pious men are gracious, serious, and ponderous ; they use not to spend their breath about trifles.

In the context, we have, *the introduction*, and *the excellency of the gospel covenant*.

First, In the introduction we have the *penman*, instrument, or amanuensis, who spoke these words, David ; and the *Author* who dictated them.

1. The penman or instrument, David, is described by his *natural* descent, " the son of Jesse ;" his *royal* dignity, " raised up on high ;" his *divine unction*, " anointed of God ;" his *employment* or *exercise*, " sweet

Psalmist of Israel," whose breath is sweet to this day.

2. The Author that dictated to David: *The Holy Ghost*, "Spirit spake by me; *God the Father*, "the God of Israel;" *Jesus Christ*, the mediator of the covenant, called here "the rock of Israel," as he is called, 1 Cor. x. 4.

Secondly, In the expressions which David employs, there are also two things considerable: *the nature of David's government*, and *the excellency of the covenant*.

1. The former which unfolds to us the nature and properties of David's kingdom, as the type, and of Christ's as the antitype, contains four particulars.

(1.) The *holiness* of it, "he that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God;" a fine character.

(2.) The *happiness* of it, "he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, a morning without clouds."

(3.) The *increase* of it, "as the tender grass springing out of the earth, by clear shining after rain."

(4.) Here is an uncomfortable exception with reference to David's family and kingdom, in these words, "Although my house be not so with God."

2. Here is an excellent description of the nature, properties, and suitableness of the gospel covenant, in these four particulars: The *durableness* of it, "everlasting;" the *order* of it, "ordered in all things;" the *sureness*, or certainty of it; and its *suitableness* to David's circumstances with respect to his present desires in this world, and his eternal salvation hereafter.

You see the text is a full storehouse, a rich treasury, a blessed magazine, whence we may fetch both meat



and medicine, work and reward, all things that concern grace and glory.

The text then presents to us David's case and his cure. His case is presented negatively, "Although my house be not so with God." And his cure positively, which is "the covenant," that is a balm for every wound, a remedy for every disease, a supply for every want.

I am not ignorant, that some give the words a different sense, in this manner, "Although my house be not so with God," that is, my house is not such an unstable, inconstant thing, to alter and change as the weather, from a glorious sunshine morning, to a dark, cloudy, gloomy evening, so as to prove a stormy, rainy day; no, no, my house and family is fixed, settled, splendid, and complete, if not in my outward affairs at present, yet in the Messiah to come out of my loins in the fulness of time; his kingdom will appear, and shine most gloriously, and break in pieces all other kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever; so we read, Dan. ii. 44.

But though that be a great truth, I am apt to incline to those interpreters, that take this as a concession, concerning the defects and imperfection of piety and tranquillity in David's family, as if he had said, I must needs confess, that neither I nor my childreir have lived so exactly, or ruled so uprightly in the fear of God as we ought; we have had our faults and folly, which have clouded our consciences and reputation, and therefore we have not enjoyed such uninterrupted prosperity as we might, had we walked more closely and circumspectly, and therefore sad clouds and storms have darkened and disturbed our heaven, yea oft benighted our state, domestic, political, and ecclesiastical, as well as personal; my children have not been like tender grass, springing up to maturity, but some of

them cut off in the prime of their days; I have been banished from my throne and family, not suffered to build God a house, nor abide in his sanctuary, my wounded spirit hath sighed out many heavy groans, God hath oft withdrawn his grace, hid his face, and left my soul on the brink of despair; yet for all this I can, when most depressed cast my eye upon the gospel covenant, and fetch relief from that in my lowest state, inward or outward.

Many inferences may be drawn from this important passage of scripture.

1. That it is a singular mercy to be entrusted with a family. This is implied and owned by David, 1 Chron. xvii. 16—25. God setteth the solitary in families, Psal. lxviii. 6.

2. Householdors must regard the state of their families. So doth David here, and Psalm ci. 2, 3; he had a large family, and had state affairs on his hands, yet he prays with his family, 2 Sam. vi. 20, and puts it not off to stewards or chaplains; see Prov. xxvii. 23.

3. A religious family is to be with God. "Although my house be not so with God," he earnestly desires all the members of his family might be with God, and laments the contrary, for the Lord is with them that are with him, 2 Chron. xv. 2.

4. The best families have their defects and imperfections. David's family for all his care, may be far from the rule, not only as to individual members, but as to the complex body of a family; there were disorders even in Christ's own family.

5. Family faults bring family calamities, family defects produce family afflictions. God will not spare offending families, though dear to him, nay, they shall smart soonest and sorest, Amos iii. 2, "You only have

I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you."

6. Family miscarriages do greatly trouble gracious householders. He speaks of it with painful feelings. O what bitterness is it to a godly father or master, to find disorders in such as are under his charge!

7. The covenant of grace is extensive and comprehensive. Pious persons have much comfort and content from it, with reference not only to themselves, but their houses and families.

8. The covenant of grace is everlasting. It is from all eternity, being connected with the covenant of redemption, betwixt the Father and Son, Tit. i. 1, 2; and endures for ever, Psal. cxi. 9.

9. There is a beautiful and admirable order in the gospel covenant. An order of persons, in the Father's election, the Son's redemption, the Holy Ghost's application, and the believer's reception. An order of things; supreme, and subordinate causes; means, instruments, promises, privileges, principles, and practices; all keep their places, they do not interfere or thwart one another.

10. The gospel covenant is sure and stable. Things are not left at uncertainties, nor do they depend on the mutable will of man, as of old it was with Adam; but they are the sure mercies of David, Isa. lv. 3, and liv. 9, 10.

11. There is that in the covenant which answers a Christian's desires. As the Christian's desire is mainly carried towards it, so there is that in it which answers and satisfies those desires; desires are vast and immense, but the blessings of the covenant run parallel, and are every way adequate to just desires.

12. A Christian's salvation is wrapt up in the gospel covenant. Upon this may a child of God venture

his soul. Eternal life is contained and comprehended in it.

I waive all these, and shall consider the text in a twofold light, in a domestic, and in a personal respect.

The former refers to David's house, the latter to his personal experience; this blessed covenant was David's chief relief, in both these cases: from the former observe,

That notwithstanding the sins and sufferings in a pious man's family which occasion much grief to his spirit, yet he is supported and satisfied with God's gracious gospel covenant.

From the latter acceptation observe,

That covenant relation is the foundation of a dying Christian's safety, satisfaction, and salvation.

It is the former observation on which I shall at present enlarge.

## CHAP. II.

### THE SINS AND SUFFERINGS OF FAMILIES OFTEN OCCASION THE GRIEF OF PARENTS.

THE principal point which I propose for consideration relates to David's family, for he mentions his house in the beginning of the text; and in the latter end of the verse there is also a reference to it, "although he make it," that is, my house, "not to grow," that is, to increase in number, power, or honour.

The former part of the verse is variously rendered, **כי לא כן ביתי עם אל**. Nor is my house so great, or of



so much worth with God.\* Alas, what is my house at best, my pedigree is without distinction. David disdains not to reflect on his humble origin, though advanced to the culminating point of civil and spiritual promotion, as a king and prophet: he magnifies God, and degrades, yea, nullifies himself, 2 Sam. vii. 18, "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house that thou hast brought me hitherto?" Others thus, there is more in the covenant than this my house before God.† All the families in the world amount not to so much as one Messiah, he, he only is the noble flourishing branch springing out of my family, who is worth us all, who conveys life and vigour to us all, this is the rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch growing out of its roots,‡ and they shall hang on him all the glory of his father's house;|| my whole family would fall into ruin but for him, on whose behalf it must be upheld, that he may be born in it; yea, who only upholds it.

Others thus; although my family and kingdom be not so holy, as to perform the conditions of the covenant so exactly as God requireth, though we are guilty in many respects before God, and he hath scourged us sore, yet God's covenant is the ground of my hope for my family, and I doubt not but my Lord will make it good.§

And what David saith of his family, any child of God may say of his, except in the peculiar case of the Messiah springing out of his loins. Thence we may safely derive this

*Doct.* That notwithstanding the sins and sufferings in a pious man's family, which occasion much grief to

\* Nec tanta est domus mea apud Deum.

† Plus est quam hæc domus mea ante Deum.—*Chald. Jon.*

‡ Isa. xi. 1. || Isa. xxii. 24. § Quamvis non sit ita.

his spirit, yet he is supported and satisfied with God's gracious gospel covenant.

In handling this point I shall

I. Premise some things proper to be known.

II. Give the proof of the point.

III. Answer a main objection.

IV. Make a short application.

I. The things to be premised are these: What may befall a godly man's family? Why these are a grief to his spirit? What is the covenant that supports him? What is in the covenant to bear him up?

A little may be advanced on each of these.

First, What may fall out in a pious man's family which may occasion his grief?

I shall mention these two things in answer:

Corruptions breaking out, and afflictions breaking in on his house; sin and suffering, and indeed suffering is the proper fruit of sinning.

1. Corruption may break out in pious families; I shall not need to instance in Adam's, Noah's, Abraham's, Isaac's, or even in Jacob's, Aaron's, Samuel's, &c. I shall keep to David's. Alas, corruption broke out sadly, both in himself and in his children.

(1.) David was guilty of sins of omission, possibly not instructing, restraining, or not punishing Amnon and Absalom, and not crossing Adonijah, 1 Kings i. 6. David was too indulgent for which he smarted.\* He was also guilty of foul sins of commission; as adultery, and the murder of his faithful servant Uriah, 2 Sam. xi. 4, 27, rashness towards Mephibosheth, 2 Sam. xix. 29, sometimes lying, changing his behaviour, &c.

(2.) His children too were deeply guilty, Amnon of incest, Absalom of rebellion, and Adonijah of ambition.†

\* 2 Sam. xii. 9—12.

† 2 Sam. xiii. 10—14. xv. 1. 1 Kings i. 7.

Alas, that there should be found such gross abominations in pious David's family, yet this was not his case only; it is said of Samuel, that his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes and perverted judgment, 1 Sam. viii. 3.

2. And what a flood gate of troubles did these sins open, which gushed in upon him, deep called to deep, all God's waves and billows went over him,\* remember David and all his afflictions, saith he, how numerous, how ponderous!† some of his children dying in the height of their career, by the visible hand of justice, one died in infancy to punish his iniquity;‡ besides foreign enemies; he had a gloomy morning, noon, and evening, what bloody wars with Saul and his house, with Philistines and Ammonites! what sad tragedies, insurrections, commotions, and confusions, threatening a total extirpation, so that David might call some child Beriah, as Ephraim did because it went evil with his house, 1 Chron. vii. 21—23, and so it hath done with many a good man's house.

Secondly, Why are these breakings out of sin, and prevalence of sufferings in their families, such a grief to pious householders?

With respect to the first, it must needs trouble them.

1. Because by sin God is greatly displeased, his name much dishonoured, religion discredited, the hearts of genuine believers saddened, the wicked scandalized and hardened; motes in professors are beams, are mountains in the eyes of profane; what will they say? they are no better than we, what are they but a pack of hypocrites? to what purpose is all their whining and praying? Our children conduct themselves as civilly as theirs, where is the covenant

\* Psal. xlii. 7.    † Psal. cxxxii. 1.    ‡ 2 Sam. xii. 14.

they boast of? Hence David, Psal. xlii. 3, "My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, where is thy God?"

2. They are greatly afflicted with the sins of children, because the beloved of their souls are endangered, they are pieces of themselves, as their own souls, how can I endure to see my own flesh scorched, and tormented in eternal flames? Oh! shall the child that came out of my loins be separated from God, a companion with devils, a fire-brand in hell? the mention of it sinks my spirits. Is all my labour lost? shall the soul of my child perish? Oh! who can endure to think of it? no wonder if that be the first of Solomon's Proverbs, chap. x. 1, "A wise son maketh a glad father; but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother." Yea, he frequently repeats it;\* other afflictions lie on the back, this goes to the heart, see Rom. ix. 1—3.

3. Consciousness in parents of their own guilt, makes children's miscarriages more uneasy and afflictive. Oh! I read my sin in my child's folly; alas, omission of due instruction, admonition, or correction hath brought my child to this, I may thank myself, I have taught my offspring by my bad example, I have not watched over them, prayed for them, or been so jealous of them, as to offer sacrifice for them continually, as I find Job did, chap. i. 5; who can tell, but if I had been faithful, I might have prevented all this? Oh! my child's sin brings my youthful vanities to my remembrance, thus I dealt with my father, to this pitch I arrived, God hath punished my sin with my child's; I am verily guilty, this cuts deep, Jer. iv. 18.

4. The affliction is heavier because it doth in some measure weaken the confidence of parents in the covenant, and endanger their faith in the promise. Pious

\* Prov. xv. 20. xvii. 25.



parents are ready to say when a child is born or baptized as Samuel of Eliab, surely the Lord's anointed is before him,\* this is a lovely child, I hope this may honour God in his day, but the child grows up, and degenerates, answers not expectations, but grows depraved and hopeless, old in sin though young in years; and now the pious parent's hopes are dashed and impaired, he is put to a stand, and knows not what to think or say, but concludes sadly, with the two apostles in another case, I trusted that he would have been one that should have been an honour to God, a comfort to me, and a blessing in the church;† but oh how am I disappointed! he proves the greatest affliction I have, oh what is become of the covenant? have I not some reason to question either God's faithfulness, or mine own interest? This was the temptation of holy David, with whom the covenant was made expressly and immediately, Psal. lxxxix. 20; God even gives him all the assurances imaginable, his word, his oath, ver. 34, 35; yet ver. 49, he saith, "Lord, where are thy former loving-kindnesses, which thou swarest unto David in thy truth?" A sad expostulation, as if God kept not his faith with David; why, what is the matter? the reason was, because providences ran counter to promises; crosses seem to make void God's covenant, ver. 38—46; "but thou hast cast off and abhorred, thou hast been wroth with thine anointed," &c. Alas, David, where is thy faith? But so it is, sense prevails in the best saints above faith at some seasons; but most of all in this case, when the children of the covenant cross the purposes of the covenant? and no doubt this becomes a great grief of heart to a believer, when he is thus sadly nonplust; till the light of the covenant rightly understood un-

\* 1 Sam. xvi. 6.

† Luke. xxiv. 21.

riddle this mystery, the poor Christian is in great perplexity. David had a promise by Samuel that he should be king, yet saith in his heart, I shall certainly perish one day by the hand of Saul.\* Why so? why, his present danger seemed to be incompatible with the performance of that promise, and though he said in his haste all men are liars;† yet when he came to himself, he would undoubtedly fret and vex himself, that he should so wrong himself and Samuel, yea, and cast such an unworthy reflection upon God himself, as though he were unfaithful to his promise. Thus will a good man do at last, but at present he is upon a strange rack, tortured betwixt hope and fear.

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### CHAP. III.

#### NATURE OF THIS COVENANT, AND WHAT THERE IS IN IT TO SUPPORT THE CHRISTIAN.

THIRDLY, It would be superfluous to say much of the nature of a covenant, yet take this short description of it.

A covenant is a voluntary, mutual compact between two parties, containing benefits to be enjoyed, and duties to be performed.

1. It is a compact between two parties, for though a single person may make a promise, yet a covenant is between two or more, and parties formerly at a distance: this is the case between God and man, so Gen. xxvi. 27, 28.

2. It is a mutual, reciprocal compact, both parties must be engaged, therefore it is called the bond of the

\* 1 Sam. xxvii. 1.

† Psal. cxvi. 11.

covenant, Ezek. xx. 37; because though they were free before, yet now they are under obligation.

3. It is a voluntary compact, both parties were free before they were obliged by covenant. Covenanting is an elective act, God is a free agent; nothing but pure love induced him to covenant with man, Deut. vii. 7, 8; and though man was not absolutely free, being God's creature, and therefore bound to his Creator, yet his actually entering into covenant is a voluntary act, Psal. cx. 3, "Thy people shall be willing or volunteers in the day of thy power."

4. Between those who have entered into a covenant engagement, there is mutual obligation to confer benefits, and perform duties, called the *habenda* and the *agenda*, things to be conferred by God, and received, by man, and duties on man's part if he expect any benefits from God, Isa. i. 19. "If you be willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land."

Yet in the covenant of grace between God and man, there are two things peculiar:

1. There is an interposing mediator, our blessed Jesus, the days-man that lays his hand on both.\* Now, saith the apostle, a mediator, is not of one, but God is one, Gal. iii. 20; that is, his business is to reconcile parties not only distinct but different.

2. This mediator is also surety or sponsor, to undertake for both parties, that is, to perform what is necessary, both what concerns conferring benefits on God's part, and performing conditions on man's part; not formally, as though Christ did believe and repent for us, to save us the labour of repenting or believing, but meritoriously, purchasing these graces for us, and efficiently working them in us, thus Jesus is made a surety of a better testament, Heb. vii. 22; he brings in everlasting

\* Job ix. 33.

righteousness, and makes God at peace with us, and all his attributes favourable to us, and employed for us; working also gracious dispositions and virtues in us, which are the conditions of the covenant, so the whole lies upon Christ, and “he is all in all;”<sup>\*</sup> he is responsible for God and man, being alone able and capable, as God and man, to fulfil necessary engagements on both sides; thus God promises what he requires, and gives what he promises; Jer. iii. 19, “But I said, how shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the host of nations? and I said thou shalt call me, my Father, and shalt not turn away from me.” *Thou shalt*, here is God’s undertaking, to give a filial disposition and perseverance. O infinite condescension of divine goodness and free grace!

An eminent divine observes,<sup>†</sup> that the gospel relating matters of fact, is a history—declaring terms on which God will be served, is a law of grace—discovering promises of life conditionally, is God’s covenant—and as accepted by man, is a mutual covenant between God and man. This law and covenant of grace, which was obtained by Christ’s death, is that legacy he left to the world, dispensed by his ambassadors, and effectually conveyed to the legatees, or heirs of promise, by his grand executor the Holy Ghost. This then is the great security of man’s salvation, “That God worketh in us, both to will and to do; that we are kept by the mighty power of God through faith unto salvation.”<sup>‡</sup> This is the excellency of the gospel dispensation of the new covenant; the old covenant laid all the stress on the shoulders of mutable man, and therefore it is judged, that the covenant of God made with Adam in innocency, was peculiar to

<sup>\*</sup> Col. iii. 11. <sup>†</sup> Mr. Baxter’s Directory. <sup>‡</sup> Phil. ii. 13. 1 Pet. i. 5.



him in that estate and went no further, and that it is not continued in any force since the fall, for "if there had been a law given, which could have given life, then righteousness had been by the law," Gal. iii. 21; but it is by the gospel covenant that we are justified and saved.

Perhaps it may be said, what is all this to the purpose? All this seems to be personal, not relating to posterity, but you told us, that there were grounds of hope for children from the covenant. How come children to be interested in this covenant?

This leads me to the fourth thing premised, namely, What is there in the gospel covenant, that is ground of encouragement to parents on the behalf of their children?

I answer, in general, parents and children are legally one party, and in civil contracts they usually stand in the same circumstances; so in the first covenant Adam being a public person, represented all his posterity, for "judgment was by one to condemnation, even upon all men;"\* we suffer for Adam's sin. And under the old testament dispensation of the covenant, God saith, Gen. xvii. 7, "I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee in their generations." And afterwards in the days of Moses, when God renewed the covenant, he saith Deut. xxix. 14, 15, "Neither with you only do I make this covenant, and this oath, but with him that standeth here with us this day, before the Lord our God, and also with him that is not here with us this day," that is, with their posterity, and so the people understood it, Deut. v. 3, "The Lord made not," that is, only, "this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us who are all of us here alive this day." And in the new testa-

\* Rom. v. 16, 18.

ment, the apostle saith, Acts ii. 39, "For the promise is unto you, and to your children;" this is a covenant that passeth to successors.\* Bargains, leases, and legacies may pass to children; children may also suffer for their parent's faults, a traitor's sons lose their father's inheritance.

Now we must look upon children in a double capacity: as children of heathens or Jews, Turks or infidels;—and as children of christian parents. Concerning the former we have little to say. It is of the latter we treat, and of these also—some are only by an external profession in covenant—and others are savingly in covenant with God; we can say little concerning the former, we insist chiefly on the latter; and of all these—some children die in infancy—and others live to years of maturity. I shall say a word or two of the former, though it be the latter that I principally have in view.

With respect to children dying in infancy, if one or both of the parents truly fear God, we can state the following grounds of hope for their salvation: for,

1. They are holy, 1 Cor. vii. 14, and though this may mean federally or relatively holy, yet they may also be partakers of real holiness.

2. Our Saviour saith, of such is the kingdom of God, or of heaven,† Matt. xix. 14, not only such as have the disposition of children, but infants themselves may be members of the church invisible here, and glorified hereafter.

3. Children of pious parents are in covenant with God, "Now to Abraham and to his seed were the promises made," Gal. iii. 16, natural as well as spiritual; it is true there was a covenant of peculiarity to give his seed the land of Canaan, and it is as true, the

\* *Fædus ad successores transiens.*

† Mark x. 14.

text speaks not of seeds but one seed, that is Christ, but the Scripture affirms, that in his seed, Christ, yea, "in thee," saith God, addressing Abraham, "shall all the families of the earth be blessed," Gen. xii. 3, for so doth the apostle interpret and apply it, Acts iii. 25, "Ye are the children of the prophets and of the covenant, which God hath made with our fathers."

4. David had good hopes that his child was gone to heaven, 2 Sam. xii. 23, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

Observe (1.) He doth not mean only into the state of the dead, where the child is, but into heaven where I shall find him, for his body was but part of him, and the least part.

(2.) This hope he had of him, though the child was the fruit of adultery.

(3.) Though the child was struck with death, as a punishment of David's sin.

(4.) Though the child had not yet circumcision, the seal of the covenant, for "he died on the seventh day," verse 18, and we know that circumcision was not to take place till the eighth day.\* The stress, then, it seems, is not laid on the seal, but on the covenant; so that we see grounds of hope for the eternal salvation of the infants of believing parents. But how and whence this comes to pass, that such infants become capable of eternal salvation, is a difficult question.

Luther thinks that infants have actual faith, from Matt. xviii. 6, "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me." So reason is in infants in its principle, root, or habit, virtually though not yet actually produced.† Others say—that they are saved in some peculiar, unknown, unspeakable way without faith. Others are of opinion, that the faith of

\* Gen. xvii. 12.

† Tanquam in principio et radice.

parents is also that of children, according to the tenour of the covenant; "I will be thy God and the God of thy seed;" thus children in some sense have faith. So the text saith, Rom. xi. 16, "If the root be holy, the branches are also holy." So in human laws the father and the heir are but one person; of this opinion was Mr. Perkins,<sup>†</sup> and he produceth the testimony of the ancients, as St. Augustin and Bernard saying, it is meet, and for the honour of God, that to whom age denies their own faith, grace should grant to them that benefit by the faith of another. Belarmine's objection, "That in this way children would be born believers, and so be conceived and born without original sin," He answers thus: "Believing parents sustain two characters, one considered as men, and thus they procreate children, having man's nature with all the corruptions of nature: the other as they are holy men, and believers, and thus their infants are not so much their children as the children of God; and infants are God's children, not by virtue of their birth, but in consequence of their parents' faith, which entitles them to all the blessings of the covenant." Thus he.

But this is not the subject of our present design and consideration.

\* Perk. vol. 1. fol. 486.



## CHAP. IV.

### SOURCES OF HOPE WHICH PARENTS DERIVE FROM THE COVENANT FOR THEIR ADULT AND SUR- VIVING CHILDREN.

II. THE next thing to be done is to establish this doctrine, That notwithstanding the sins and sufferings, breaking forth in a godly man's family, or breaking in upon it, which occasion much grief to his spirit, yet he is, and hath reason to be supported and satisfied from God's gracious gospel-covenant.

I am very sensible that I have undertaken a difficult task, and walk in an untrodden path ; but this I may confidently affirm, that whatever befalls a believer, he may fetch all good out of this blessed treasury : for—either his children shall be laid hold on by converting grace—or not : if they be, O what cause will he have to magnify covenant love on their behalf ! if not, still he will exceedingly adore covenant grace, on his own account, which hath made him to differ, and in the worst case will find something in the covenant for supporting his spirit, and sanctifying his bitter cup of affliction, in the death of children. As to this latter, I shall say nothing but refer you to a treatise of Mr. John Flavel's, called the “Balm of the Covenant,” applied to the bleeding wounds of afflicted saints.

But my present business is to gather up some gracious promises, like flowers, out of the garden of scripture, which may refresh the drooping hearts of God's poor children, sorrowing for the miscarriages of their children, that they may turn them into prayer, or use them as a cordial to support them, till the Lord shine upon the souls of their beloved offspring.

In general observe, that as the covenant of grace is a blessed constellation, so every promise is an orient, refulgent star, to shed both light and a cheering influence on the weary traveller, amidst dark and dismal dispensations, wherein he is appalled with sad fears that his child will be a cast-away.

The question is, what grounds of hope in the scriptures have pious parents, for their children that are grown, or growing up and likely to survive or outlive them? The resolving of this is of exceeding great importance, and having searched the sacred records, I do find twelve sorts of promises that may encourage the hearts of parents.

1. The first and chief promise is of God himself, Gen. xvii. 7, "I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations for an everlasting covenant; to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." This extends both to Abraham's natural seed, and afterwards to his spiritual seed, all Gentile believers, Rom. iv. 12, 18. O what a privilege is this! whatever God is, hath, or can be or do, is for believers, of all that is communicable, divine power, wisdom, goodness, mercy, holiness, justice, is the portion of believers, and their seed, whatever they can ask or expect from a God, shall be in due season, laid out in them and for them; this one word is the substance and confluence of all good, temporal, spiritual, eternal; *My God* is the most extensive and comprehensive word in the world.\* What can a man desire more, and no less will give a gracious soul content for himself and his seed; no less is in the covenant, Jer. xxxi. 33, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord," Psal. xxxiii. 12. God in some sense may be the God of nations and families, as well as in-

\* Deus meus et omnia.

dividuals, and if some boast of pedigree, wealth, honour, a numerous offspring, or worldly prosperity, yet let David reckon up the epitome, the sum total of man's felicity, he will thus conclude, "happy is that people whose God is the Lord," Psal. cxliv. 12—15. Happy parents that bequeath such a legacy to their posterity, though they should leave them in poverty.

2. Next to that and as a means to enjoy God, is the promise of Jesus Christ, the mediator of the covenant. Isa. xlii. 6, "I will give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles." It is true, God vouchsafed to the Jewish nation this privilege, that "of them as concerning the flesh Christ should come;"\* but they cannot monopolize this glorious gift, for now in Christ Jesus, "we who sometimes were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ;"† and poor Gentiles laying hold on the covenant, are become free denizens of all Jewish privileges that are essential to salvation, for "we are all one in Christ Jesus;"‡ and promises are "to us that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call," Acts ii. 39; even in Christ himself, "in whom all the promises of God are yea, and in him, Amen."|| Nor can any man have an interest in any one promise for himself or his seed, without an interest in Christ; there never was or can be any covenant between God and man since the fall, but through Christ; he then that hath Christ, hath something to plead for his children more than another hath; he only "is all and in all for ourselves and ours;§ and they shall hang on him all the glory of his Father's house, the offspring and the issue, all vessels of small quantity," Isa. xxii. 24. All believers are God's family, and by faith in prayer, they may freely hang upon him their off-

\* Rom. ix. 5.

† Eph. ii. 13.

‡ Gal. iii. 28.

|| 2 Cor. i. 20.

§ Col. iii. 11.

spring, that is, children, grand-children, the smallest and least of the vessels that are in their house, he will not reject them, but graciously receive them; himself will take infants into his arms, as himself being an infant, was taken into old Simeon's arms, and both old and young are blessed by him. O happy parents that lay their surviving seed in so kind a bosom! they cannot miscarry that have Christ for their guardian.

3. Another legacy that parents may leave their children, are the gracious influences of the Holy Ghost, the third person of the blessed Trinity. Isa. xlv. 3, 4, "For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty. I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring, and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses." There is no interest in God or Christ, but by the operation of the Spirit: the Holy Ghost proceeding from Father and Son, teacheth believers all things, convinceth of sin, reneweth the will, begetteth faith, uniteth the soul to God, filleth the empty vessel with divine gifts, graces, influences, and comforts; \* all the good things of heaven are conveyed into the soul by our Lord's substitute; the Spirit assisteth, quickeneth, enlargeth, supporteth, and satisfieth; yes, saith the Christian, I have had much experience of the Spirit's help in my own soul, but what reason have I to hope for the like to my children? Look on the text again, "I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed:" it shall not come on them by drops, but be poured on them abundantly: they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, see the full promise in Joel ii. 28. accomplished, Acts ii. 17, 18, "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy." It is true there is something in that promise arbitrary and extraordinary,

\* John xiv. 16, 26. xvi. 8, 13.



suitcd to that dispensation, but something there is also common, permanent, and essentially necessary to true christianity, which God makes good to believers and their seed in all ages. O happy children ! that have “ the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion and communications of the Holy Ghost,” 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

4. Children of believers are rightful heirs of all gospel privileges. I may in a sound sense say of them, as Paul of the Jewish church, Rom ix. 4, “ Who are Israelites, to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises.” There are two sorts of privileges for them :

(1.) External, as the ordinances ; they being born within the pale of the visible church, have the prayers of God’s people for them. As the children of Abraham had “ the seal of circumcision, at eight days old ;” \* so children of believers are baptized, being disciples of Christ, † and thus have God’s sheep-mark set upon them betimes, and are taken into his peculiar protection ; and growing up, and owning their baptismal covenant they enjoy,

(2.) Those essential privileges that accompany salvation, as reconciliation, adoption, justification, and are in a fair way to eternal salvation, for they lie in the road of free grace, under the droppings of the sanctuary, where the Spirit is wont to breathe the breath of spiritual life ; if any be proper heirs of God’s special care, and ordinances, surely it is the children of God’s people, Psal. lxxix. 35, 36. “ For God will save Zion, and build the cities of Judah ;” who shall have the benefit of this salvation ? He answers, “ the seed also of his servants shall inherit it, and they that love

\* Rom. iv. 11.

† Matt. xxviii. 19.

his name shall dwell therein." Parents have prayed for the church's deliverance, and their children shall reap the fruit of their prayers, so Psal. cii. 28, "The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee:" there is a double mercy here, first, in restoring ordinances, and then in vouchsafing this privilege to the children of believers. O what would a child of God give to know that his posterity should see better days? You have it in the promise, and may have it in the performance, if you reach out the hand of faith to receive it, for yourselves and yours.

5. Children of believing parents are converted to God by ordinances. Psal. cx. 3, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power," that is, in dispensing powerful ordinances, "in the beauties of holiness," for holiness is full of glory, "from the womb of the morning," that is, from the beginning of Christ's entrance upon his kingdom, "thou hast the dew of thy youth," that is, those young people of the seed of the faithful that shall be born to the Messiah, resembling dew for quality and number, and the wonderful manner of generation. But a plainer text we have in Isa. xxix. 22, 23, "Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale," through the loss of good blood, or death of the pious; "but when he seeth his children the work of my hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify my name." O blessed sight! to behold God's image and workmanship in the souls of our children! this is far better than to behold our image upon them: God's picture is drawn by his own hand, with the pencil of his word and Spirit: the discovery of this will raise high monuments to the glory of free grace. "Lift up thine eyes," saith God, Isa. lx. 4, 5, "thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters

shall be nursed at thy side:" I know it means Gentile converts, and it is so much the more of concern to us. Another text saith, "They shall bring thy sons in their arms,"\* with great care and tenderness, as nurses carry young infants in their bosoms that they be not hurt. O what a fine sight is it to see converts flocking to Christ, and into his church, "like doves to their windows or cotes!"† the Seventy translate it, "as doves with their young ones unto me." You may hope for your children's saving conversion, having those encouraging promises.

6. Pious persons' children may and shall be useful instruments of public good to the church of God, Isa. xlix. 17, "Thy children shall make haste," or as others render it, "thy builders:" and her children were her builders, as we read in Ezra and Nehemiah. That is a glorious day, when destroyers are gone, and the the church's children build Zion's temple and walls; but so it shall be, Isa. lviii. 12, "And they that shall be of thee," that is, thy children spiritual or natural, or both, "shall build the old waste places, thou shalt raise the foundation of many generations." Is not this worth something to have blessed instruments of reformation raised out of your loins, as magistrates or ministers? how did it gladden David's heart, that his son Solomon must build God a house, 2 Sam. vii. 13, "He shall build a house for my name." David echoes, verse 18, "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house that thou hast brought me hitherto?" And what if a Zerubbabel or a Joshua proceed out of thy loins? who knows but some of thy posterity may be raised up as pious ministers to convert sinners to God? hope and pray, for all things are possible with God, and thou hast encouragement from the covenant.

\* Isa. xlix. 22.

† Isa. lx. 8.

7. Another encouraging word to parents with respect to their children is, that principles of grace and a profession of godliness shall continue to future generations, Isa. lix. 21, "As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord, my Spirit that is upon thee and my words which I have put in thy mouth shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever." This is a large and long-lasting charter; God's spirit within his children, and the owning of his name with their lips, and this for ever! What can godly parents desire more? Whether this spirit import a spirit of prophecy or a spirit of sanctification, surely it is a rich kindness, that it shall run in this straight line and channel to many generations, that the name of God, as well as your name may be kept up in your family perpetually when you are dead and gone; O happy parents that have such children! happy children that had such parents! and blessed be God that embraceth both in the bosom of the covenant! That is a soul supporting word in Haggai ii. 5, "According to the word that I covenanted with" your fathers, even with "you, when you came out of Egypt, so my Spirit remaineth among you;" fear ye not, be not daunted, there were as many and great obstructions in the way of mercy then as now, yet grace overcame them, and I have not taken away my Spirit from you notwithstanding your multiplied provocations for two thousand years, but still it is among you and shall continue to many generations: may not faith triumph in this promise?

8. The children of pious parents shall excite particular observation, Isa. lxi. 8, 9, "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, and their seed shall be among the Gentiles," that is, Gentile churches, "and



their offspring among the people, all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed." Men shall say to each other, do you not see the faithful child of such a believing father? O how many a precious day have we had with such a one's father, mother, or grandfather! this is the pious child of a zealous father, you see it is not in vain to seek and serve God, I remember the prayers and tears poured out for his child, and I see the blessed fruit thereof; God is a prayer hearing God: of some children we may say, as Paul to Timothy, 2 Tim. i. 5. "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded that in thee also." His grandmother's name was Lois, which signifies better, his mother's name Eunice, signifying victor, and Timothy is the fear of God. If parents choose the better part, God will give them victory over the world, sin, and Satan; yea, they shall have power with God, and have God-fearing children, in whom others will observe and admire the grace of God.

9. Children's children to many generations are remembered with covenant kindness: so in the second commandment, Exod. xx. 6, "Showing mercy unto thousands," that is, of generations, "of them that love me and keep my commandments.\*" This is transcendent mercy, punishment extending but to three or four of them, verse 5; you will say, mercy and justice are God's two arms, is the one longer than the other? Answer, no, they are equally infinite, but he maketh his church to feel more of his mercy than of his justice, "with the Lord there is mercy," why so? because "with him is plenteous redemption," Psal. cxxx.

\* Deut. vii. 9.

7. It is a covenant of grace, and Christ interposeth as mediator of it: O the overflowings of free grace to many generations! Psal. ciii. 17, 18, "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children." Mark it, it is called righteousness, to shew it is a discharge of his obligation, by which he hath in some sort bound himself to parents to do good to their posterity, for it was mercy to Abraham to make a covenant, but it is truth and faithfulness to perform it to Jacob, and his rising seed many years after;\* as it is founded in his eternal purpose, and continues to eternity; and this is the reason of our hopes for the calling of the Jews, because they are beloved for their fathers' sake, or rather because of God's covenant with their ancestors, Rom. xi. 27, 28. O what encouragement is this to parents that God will not utterly cast off their seed, but will resume thoughts of love to them at last!

10. God will restore the wandering children of his people by seasonable and sanctified correction;† Psal. lxxxix. 29—35, "If his children forsake my law and walk not in my judgments," that is, if they forfeit the privileges promised, by non-performance of the conditions, "then will I visit their transgression with a rod, and their iniquity with stripes, nevertheless my loving kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail." God hath adopted affliction to be a branch of covenant affection; it is a promise, *I will visit*, not so much a threatening, for in faithfulness he afflicts his children; he will not take so much pains with a slave as with a son;† he will make his children thank God for a chastisement; Lord, saith a godly parent, bring home my child though it

\* Mic. vii. 20.

† 2 Sam. vii. 14, 15. Psal. cxix. 75.

be by weeping cross ; starve my prodigal son, or feed him with husks, that he may reflect on his father's plenteous table ; afflict his body rather than suffer his soul to perish ; cast him on a sick bed, rather than cast him into hell ; let his purgatory be here and his heaven hereafter. Now our gracious God answers his children's prayers ; good Hezekiah's prayers for his extravagant son Manasseh were answered by God's taking him among the thorns, binding him with fetters, and carrying him to Babylon, till he had humbled him to purpose, and made him know that Jehovah was God, 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11—13. Doubtless the natural as well as the spiritual father of the prodigal will welcome home the child, though broken on the wheel.

11. The covenant engageth for a blessing on parents' instruction and correction of their erring children : this is of great use, (1.) For instruction, Prov. xxii. 6, "Train up a child in the way he should go ;" there is the parent's duty, do thy duty to set him right in the beginning of his way, so some read it, "and when he is old he will not depart from it," that is, not easily, or ordinarily, as if he had said, if thou that art the father wilt do thy duty faithfully, I will undertake to do my part ; set thou their faces in the right road, and I will keep them in it ; I will bless thy instructions, admonitions, counsels, and example, see Gen. xviii. 19, God saith of Abraham, "I know him that he will command his children, and his household after him ;" you will say, what is he better for that ? they will choose whether they will obey or not ; nay, God saith, but I will undertake for them, "and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment." His labour shall not be in vain ; I live, saith God, to make his words take impression on his surviving children, when he is dead ? (2.) For correction you have a remarkable

promise, Prov. xxiii. 13, 14, "Withhold not correction from the child, for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die," I will take care of him; "thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell." O blessed scourging! surely such a scourge as fetcheth blood is easier than hell torments; but a benediction shall be upon that correction. That is a cruel parent, who would rather see his child a flaming faggot in the scorching fire, than try to whip folly out of him, that is cruel pity, better he should cry here, than wail hereafter, yea and curse thee for ever, who wouldst not speak a word or give him a tap, to prevent these intolerable torments. O the good that seasonable correction may do! if thou prevail not to make thy child good, yet thou wilt have comfort in the discharge of thy duty, there is good hope of both by the blessing of God, Prov. xxix. 17, "Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest, yea he shall give delight unto thy soul;" yet take this caution, that these promises must not be understood absolutely, necessarily, and universally producing this effect, but ordinarily so it is, and this is a sufficient motive to parents to do their duty, and encouragement therein.

12. The last encouragement to parents from the covenant of God, with respect to their surviving children, is, that God will take care of their outward concerns in the world, Prov. xx. 7; "the just man walketh in his integrity, his children are blessed after him," if their father hath not heaped up riches by cunning and covetous devices, and so leaves them but little in the world, yet he hath left them in the hands of a good Father, who will take care of them, when their earthly parents are gone; for this blessed covenant is not confined to the persons of the pious, but entailed on their posterity, Psal. cxii. 1, 2, "Blessed is the man that



feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments, his seed shall be mighty upon earth, the generation of the upright shall be blessed." Correspondent with this, I call to mind an anecdote, told me by a reverend minister in London, who knew a poor and pious preacher in Wiltshire, that had many children, and little to maintain them, one asked him, how he thought they could shift when he was gone, he answered, I am not at all afraid about that, I am more afraid for them if they should ride up and down London streets in their coaches; which came to pass, for some of them came to be aldermen of that famous city. Our frequent experience confirms this truth, that God takes care of his upright-hearted servants' seed when they are laid in the dust; let us remember holy David's observation, Psal. xxxvii. 25, "I have been young, and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." If there have been some few exceptions, yet these do not destroy the truth of a general proposition; howbeit temporal promises were more express and positive to the Jews of old, than to Christians in the times of the gospel, which consists more in spiritual things. But this will remain a truth that children of pious parents are usually provided for comfortably, even in things that concern this life, if it tends to God's glory, and their good, and if God see it good in his infinite wisdom, which limitations must always be annexed to temporal promises; but if they be poor, defamed, sick, in prisons, or banished, yet "all these work together for their good," Rom. viii. 28.

## CHAP. V.

### ANSWER TO AN OBJECTION AGAINST THE PREMISES.

III. ANOTHER thing in the general division of the doctrinal part, is an answer to a main objection, which is the following :

You have produced many promises as branches of the gospel covenant, that the children of godly parents, shall have converting grace, that God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost shall be theirs, that they are heirs of gospel privileges, that they shall be sanctified, and be useful instruments in the church, that they shall adorn their profession with a holy conversation, and if they should wander that God will restore them ; that he will bless parents' instructions, and corrections, and take care of their outward concerns, &c.

Now do we not see by daily observation the direct contrary to all this, how many worthy ministers have had worthless sons ? how many profligate children are there of gracious parents ? nay, do we not see some children of pious parents miscarry more than others of their civil but worldly neighbours, more proud, scornors of godliness, companions of drunkards, swearers, debauched persons, who have proved a great dishonour to God, scandal to religion, grief to real Christians, and heart-breaking to their parents, have even so prejudiced the spirits of wicked men, that they say, this religion is but a fancy, praying so much is needless, and what is become of the covenant you so much boasted of ? nay, have we not seen some children of pious parents live and die visibly graceless, under tokens of God's wrath, yea, hastening their death by intemperance and unbridled wickedness ? how is this consistent

with all that you have spoken? how is God true to his covenant?

This is a sad truth, and cannot be denied, an awful consideration, which possibly hath staggered the faith of some, and strengthened the hands of wicked men against the power of godliness, and is too palpable an observation to be denied. But yet I hope to throw some light on this awful providence from the holy scriptures by proposing these seven considerations:

1. Some of the children of God's people can set their seal to God's faithfulness, in the covenant made to their parents and their seed; this illustrates God's truth and the goodness of religion. I doubt not but some children of the covenant can speak the language of Solomon, in 1 Kings viii. 23, 24, "Lord God of Israel, there is no God like unto thee, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart, who hast kept with thy servant David my father, that which thou promisedst him, thou spakest also with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand as it is this day;" will not some stand forth and say, I bless God for pious parents, my soul hath found the benefit of their prayers, and the fruit of God's promise, I prefer this charter to all earthly privileges; let others say what they please, I will for ever adore free grace, that brought me forth under so good a covenant, it is better to me than to be born of a royal race, and being heir to a crown, "he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation, my father's God, and I will exalt him;"\* and cannot one and another parent say, God hath "spoken well of his servant's house for a great while to come;"† behold I see the buds of grace in this or that child, and a saving growing work in another; blessed be free grace, I can

\* Exod. xv. 2.

† 2 Sam. vii. 19.

hold forth this token for good against all the cavils of profane spirits, and against my own unbelieving fears.

2. God never forsakes the children of pious parents till they forsake him; poor children run away from God before he turns them off, 1 Chron. xxviii. 9, "If thou seek him he will be found of thee, but if thou forsake him he will cast thee off for ever." If Solomon, or any other child or children of a pious father, put on a cloak of religion, to please parents or accomplish a selfish purpose while they live, and cast off religion, and perversely turn their backs on God, and embrace wicked ways; without true repentance they have freed God from any obligation to perform his promise, because they have voluntarily discarded the condition on their part; now being at ripe age, when they are fit to make a choice, it is a voluntary act, proceeding from their own wilfulness, "You will not come unto me;"\* and then it becomes a judicial act in God to forsake them, because they first forsook him; and neither they nor their parents can bring any charge against God for withdrawing from them that grace which they have abused, and which he is not bound to give them.

3. Parents have no reason to call God to an account for non-performance of the terms of the covenant, but themselves for their neglect of duty to their children; this is ordinarily the reason of their children's miscarriage: even pious parents are too apt to miss it, by over-fondness and negligence in their education, not admonishing, counselling, or correcting them; David had been too indulgent to Adonijah in not crossing him, and doubtless his conscience disturbed him for his ambition; this is a plain case, good Eli honoured his sons above God, 1 Sam. ii. 29, by permitting them to

\* John v. 40.



dishonour him, choosing rather to offend God by connivance at their sin, than displease them by sharp rebukes, effectual restraints, and severe punishments, for as a father, and as a magistrate he ought to have curbed them: therefore God saith, "I will judge his house for ever, for the iniquity which he knoweth of, because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." O what secret twitches do the consciences of parents give them, when their children grow up and take not good ways! alas, I sinned against God, and now God leaves them to themselves; I have no cause to censure God, but condemn myself; God is righteous, their sin is a glass in which to see my own. Lord humble me, and convince them; O pardon my iniquity, that I may pray believingly for my offspring.

4. God may pass by the immediate descendants of his faithful children and work upon their more remote posterity: free grace sometimes runs under ground for a season and breaks out at a distance, a son is bad, but grace lays hold on a grandson; Jehoshaphat was a good man, 2 Chron. xx. 32, but Jehoram, his son, proved wicked, 2 Chron. xxi. 6; also Ahaziah, his grandson, walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, 2 Chron. xxii. 3, 4; Uzziah did right in the sight of the Lord, 2 Chron. xxvi. 4; and Jotham, his son, 2 Chron. xxvii. 2—6; but Ahaz, the next descendant, cast off the fear of God, 2 Chron. xxviii. 1, 2; yet electing love broke out again in good Hezekiah, 2 Chron. xxix. 2; it continued however dormant for a considerable time, and laid not hold of Manasseh, 2 Chron. xxxiii. 2. Some even think his repentance was forced, and not sincere and saving; however the grace of God withdrew from Amon his son, 2 Chron. xxxiii. 22; but laid hold on good Josiah, his grand-

son, 2 Chron. xxxiv. 3. You see how grace passes over the head of one, and lays its hand upon that of another, yea, sometimes it crosses hands, and as Jacob guided his hands wittingly laying his right hand on Ephraim and his left hand on Manasseh, setting the younger before the elder, contrary to Joseph's desire and design :\* so God crosses our natural affections and expectations, blessing such as we least thought of, and leaving others whom our hearts were most set upon, to convince us of the freeness of his grace : but thus his covenant doth stand sure.

5. Delays are no denials. God hath his time to bring in the prodigal sons of pious parents ; the King of heaven can take what time he pleaseth to work on the hearts of men ; Saul shall long persecute the church, yet become a chosen vessel. It deserves attention that the children of many pious parents sowed their wild oats in youth ; even Jacob was guilty of many faults, especially of stealing the blessing by a lie : several of Jacob's sons had foul spots, Reuben and Judah were guilty of incest, Simeon and Levi of rash anger, treachery, and murder ; yet all distinguished patriarchs : several of them combined out of envy to sell Joseph, whereby they almost broke their father Jacob's honest heart ; but let not religious parents make too hasty conclusions ; he that believes makes not haste ; it may be God defers to hear because he loves your company, and would make you an errand to the throne of grace, your prayers are yet too cold, he thinks fit to quicken importunity : the answer will come doubly loaded, and pay for all your pains and patience ; give God the glory of his wisdom, he knows how to husband your mercies better than you. It is worth observing that those women in sacred writ that waited longest for children

\* Gen. xlviii. 14, 20.

had the best, as Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Hannah, Manoah's wife, and Elizabeth. Indulge not despondency, you may see God's salvation before you die.

6. If God never shews mercy to your seed, you must not so much murmur at his justice, as bow to his sovereignty; he is the absolute disposer of his own grace; such an act of prerogative may be adored, but must not be questioned: the apostle Paul having gone as far as Scripture led him on the subject of God's casting off the covenanted seed of believing Abraham, and adopting the forlorn and forsaken Gentiles, stands on the brink of the unfathomable abyss, and cries, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out!"\* The immensity and ineffability of these counsels are such depths! as he saith in Job xxxiii. 13, "He giveth not account of any of his matters;" they are oft unaccountable, but never unrighteous; kings have mysteries of state, not proper to be communicated to vulgar capacities,† and much more the infinite God; "secret things belong to God."‡ It is presumption to pry into God's ark, our weak eyes cannot behold this glorious sun: poor sinner, down on thy knees, and say thus to God: Lord, I will rather admire the riches of thy grace to my own soul, than quarrel with thee for not giving my child grace; it is an inscrutable depth, my humble ignorance shall stop at thy pleasure, my will shall be melted into thy will; if my offspring must glorify thy justice, I will acquiesce therein and say, though "clouds and darkness are round about thee, yet righteousness and judgment are the habitations of thy throne," Psal. xvii. 2.

7. Yet for all this, religion must be owned and vin-

\* Ω βὰθος, Rom. xi. 33. † Arcana imperii. ‡ Deut. xxix. 29.

dedicated, "God is good to the soul that seeks him;" to them "that wait for him."\* He never said to the seed of Jacob, seek "ye me in vain."† If God never shew mercy to any of my descendants, yet I will never justify the wicked, by saying, "It is in vain to serve God."‡ No, God forbid, I will never say, that prayerless families are as good as praying families, my own experience, and thousands more, besides the infallible verity of the faithful God, will contradict that atheistical maxim. "In the keeping of God's commandments I have found great reward:"|| yea, I have found that the miscarriage of my child, which is the greatest cross that ever I met with, hath been blessed for the good of my soul; as the good woman said, bearing my children and my crosses has cost me dear, but I could not be without either. It is not fit that I should choose my affliction, and what God lays on is welcome, I will esteem Christ no worse for his cross; for I find these bitter waters most medicinal, and the sweetest fruit grows on this bitter tree; the depravity of my child hath helped to make me better; this heart-breaking hath proved a heart-melting; it is true, wicked men are hardened by seeing the children of the covenant thus miscarry, even as divisions and offences amongst God's people, are occasions of their ruin, yea, the gospel preaching is the savour of death to some,§ but as God is just therein to them, so my soul hath cause to bless the physician of souls, that so tempers this poison, as to make it wholesome physic to my poor soul; my crosses are better than their comforts. I will commend religion, though I mourn over my irreligious child; godliness is gain, though I gain not grace for my child by it.

\* Lam. iii. 25.

† Isa. xlv. 19.

‡ Mal. iii. 14.

|| Psal. xix. 11.

§ Matt. x. 34, 35. 2 Cor. ii. 16.



## CHAP. VI.

### THE SUBJECT CALCULATED TO PRODUCE CON- VICTION AND HUMILIATION.

ON a review of what has been advanced the reflections I shall make, are intended to produce conviction and humiliation.

If it be true, that notwithstanding the sins and sufferings in a pious man's family, which occasion much grief to his spirit, yet he is comforted and satisfied with God's gracious, gospel covenant; then it follows by the rule of contraries that those families that have no right to this gospel covenant are in a dreadful state, have no grounds of comfort or satisfaction, no hopes of salvation; so remaining they are not under a blessing, but under a curse, Prov. iii. 33, "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked;" the plague is in that house; set a cross on the door, and say, Lord, have mercy upon it; wicked families, read your doom, and a train of curses, Deut. xxviii. 15—19; you make a great reckoning of your estates, alas there is no covenant blessing on any thing you have, they are in themselves great blessings of God, but to you they are cursed, Mal. ii. 2, "If you will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory to my name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and will curse your blessings, yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart;" this is an awful, flaming declaration uttered against impenitent, inconsiderate sinners; not only their persons, but all their domestic concerns are under a curse; your meat, money, houses, wives, children, garments, employments, enjoyments, all that you do, all that you have shall be accursed; this is a heavy

curse ; a curse uttered by man has sometimes operated long and dreadfully ; Noah pronounced a curse on Ham's offspring, which never left them till the Canaanites were extirpated by Shem's posterity. \*

The subject is important and affecting, I shall say something,

First, To irreligious parents, and then to irreligious children.

I begin with addressing parents within the bounds of the visible church. 1. Some understand not this covenant, they never set themselves to consider it ; they bring their infants to be baptized according to custom, because others do so, and it would be a shame not to have them christened, neighbours would cry out against them ; but they neither know the meaning of baptism, nor covenant, nor have they any mind to know them. 2. They take no pains to get their own souls interested in this covenant, but "are strangers from the covenants of promise,"† and so have no hope for themselves or children. We find great fault with prodigal parents that waste and alienate their ancestors' inheritance, which should have descended to their children, but it is a thousand times worse for parents, to cut off this blessed entail of the gospel covenant. 3. Most are negligent in doing their duty to children. Alas, how few will take pains to instruct them in the principles of religion, the nature, use, ends of the seals of the covenant, in praying for them, as if there were no such text in the bible, or they had never made such a promise, "as to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord!"‡ Ah ! wretched father, or mother, out of your own mouth are you condemned, who promise what you never intend to perform ; how notoriously do you falsify your words, and betray your

\* Gen. ix. 25.

† Eph. ii. 12.

‡ Eph. vi. 4.

trust. 4. There are too many parents that are scandalous, profane, and atheistical, and teach their young ones to lie and swear, to be drunk and unclean, by the evil example they set before them. A child brought up with Plato, coming home, and hearing his father in a furious passion, could say, I never saw or heard the like in Plato. Alas, sirs, you lessen your esteem with your children by sinful courses, you bring guilt upon your family, yea, you do your endeavour to root out your family; "the seed of the wicked shall be cut off," Psal. xxxvii. 28. The whole Psalm, and daily experience testify the same. Ah sinner, "thou hast consulted shame to thy house,"\* and some generations hence may reap the fruits of thy folly. The text saith, "God will visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate him."† There are some hereditary sins, and some hereditary punishments bequeathed as a heritage to children; divines vindicate God's justice by proving that God may righteously punish sins of relations in their correlates, for children, say some, are portions of parents,‡ as people are the riches and strength of princes; yea, they have in them something of the parent, they are parts of them.|| So David was punished in his child's death. But I shall not spend more time on this point, because so much has been said on it by many others.

How could you see your children perish in hell through your fault? How could you hear their cries, and see their torments in the infernal lake, gnashing their teeth, and with devouring flames about their ears, saying, oh wretched parents, that by your soul-destroying negligence, have brought yourselves and me into

\* Hab. ii. 10.    † Exod. xx. 5.    ‡ Filii sunt res parentum.

|| Aliquid parentis.

this lamentable state! why would you not speak a word to me, nor seek an interest in the covenant of grace for me, to prevent these eternal torments? that saw me go on in sin, and would not stop my course betimes, by faithful admonition and sound correction, nay, that set me a bad example, and were content that I should perish with you, cursed be the day that ever I should know such criminal parents, well had it been for me, that I had never been born, or had been brought forth a brute without a rational soul, that I might have died like a brute; I had even been comparatively happy if you my parents had put me to death, or like the heathen Thracians, lamenting my birth, had buried me betimes, and rejoiced at my death, because of the miseries of human life; but O I was born and brought up for the murderer, the murderer of souls; I had then gone as a condemned person, out of a dark prison to the place of execution, but now, having lived so long in the world, I have fought against God, and sunk my soul deeper in hell. Oh! woe is me, that I lived under such cruel parents, and as the dying person said, I am going to hell and my wicked mother must follow after.

And oh, the agonizing feelings of lost parents on the hideous outcries of the fruit of their own bodies! here neighbour's fare is not good fare, but the rich man's torments are aggravated by his fine brethren's coming into the same condemnation. Every shriek of the child will tear the heart of the self-condemning father; how easily, will he say, might I have prevented these despairing groans by a faithful discharge of duty! what if I had followed my wandering child with sighs and tears to God and instructed him while there was hope, but now all too late, all too late, the guilt of my child's blood is now required at my hands; had I scourged him so as to fetch blood at every lash, it



would not have been so dreadful as the lashes of divine vengeance; had I disinherited him for his faults, it would not have been so overwhelming, as my being banished with him from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; oh! what is temporary punishment to eternal torments; oh! that God would strike the hearts of poor, careless parents with feelings of pity towards their poor perishing offspring.

In the next place I would address graceless, irreligious children, grown up. It is no excuse for you to be bad, because your parents are bad, are you so wildly sociable as to go to hell for company? This is like the miserable Indians that leap into their parents' graves to be buried with them; or like the Italian, who on visiting his father's sepulchre, and washing all parts of the monument with lamentable tears, fell down dead; God may say, who requires this at your hands? But still it is worse to follow their pernicious examples, as too many children do;\* you may reverence the memory of your ancestors, yet examine their dictates by the word of truth, and not be what the young novice entering into a monastery was advised to be, namely, like an ass, to swallow down all that comes.† No, no, you are redeemed from your vain conversation, received by tradition from your fathers, and therefore must inquire not simply for the old way, but which is the good way.‡ It is too much like what Cicero, the heathen orator, thinks a commendable piece of religion, to live and die in the religion of our ancestors. It rather becomes children to take warning by their fathers' sins and faults, and to avoid them and

\* Progenies viperarum nominat potius quam viperas ut toti ordini exprobrat virulentam malitiam; totum corpus damnare voluit.—*Calv. in Harm. Evan. in Matt. iii. 7. Jer. vi. 16.*

† Tu et asinus unum estote.

‡ 1 Pet. iv. 18.

their bad consequences. So God saith, "If the father beget a son, who seeth all his father's sins, considereth and turneth, he shall not die for his father's iniquity:"\* but if you follow their sinful courses, you justify them, condemn God's ways, and destroy your own souls; yea, you bring upon yourselves the guilt of your fathers' sins besides your own; wicked parents are set before you as sea-marks, to avoid, not as land-marks, to guide you. The heathen orator said, parents are as household gods, their words should be as oracles;† but alas, they are only men, and may mistake and miscarry, but God in his word is an unerring guide: follow the Lord and you cannot do wrong or miscarry, but you may miscarry by following the best men, you will certainly miscarry if you follow bad men. The woman of Samaria erroneously pleads the place of her ancestors' worship;‡ and Jeremiah confutes the fond plea of the foolish Jews alleging their fathers' practices, Jer. xlv. 20—23.

But I shall rather suggest a few words for the conviction of the irreligious children of pious parents, who so degenerate from their ancestors, that it may be said as in Isa. lxiii. 16, "Abraham is ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledgeth us not;" that is, as some take it, if our godly ancestors, Abraham and Jacob, were now alive, or raised up from the dead, they would not own us for their own legitimate offspring, we are so unlike them. I fear this is too true of the children of pious predecessors gone to rest, who tread not in their fathers' steps, but take a contrary course; their fathers prayed in their families, but the children have left off that practice; the fathers frequented religious societies, but the children frequent alehouses and bad company; the fathers walked closely with God, but

\* Ezek. xviii. 14—18. † Θεοὶ Ἐφεστίοι. ‡ John iv. 20.

the children desert him and his institutions. Woe, woe, to such children !

1. They are perjured covenant-breakers, who in their baptism engaged to be the Lord's servants, subjects, and soldiers, and to fight under Christ's banner against the world, the flesh, and the devil, and took listing money, but now have turned their backs on Christ, and fight the devil's battles against Christ. Woe be to such perfidious rebels ; what is the doom of such as outrun their colours ? is it not death ? Covenant-breakers are ranked amongst the worst of sinners : amongst heathens, Rom. i. 31 ; and such as make perilous times in the latter days, 2 Tim. iii. 3. If it were but a man's covenant it is a great crime to violate it, much more this ; the covenant of marriage is in some sense the covenant of God,\* but this more immediately, and he will avenge the quarrel of his covenant, Lev. xxvi. 25. Oh sirs ! how dare you look God in the face whose covenant ye have broken ? What have you to do "to take his covenant in your mouths,†" when conscience flies in your face ?

2. You have lost the benefit of your infant privileges ; your infant membership was but calculated for your infant state ; now you are grown up adult persons, you must stand for yourselves, and no longer your parents for you ; now you must "live by your own faith ;"‡ you must enter personally into covenant with God, repent, and obey the gospel yourselves, or else if thou be a breaker of this gospel law, "thy circumcision becomes uncircumcision ;|| that is, thy privileges are made void and insignificant : so God reckons the uncircumcised in heart with the uncircumcised in flesh, Jer. ix. 26 ; and saith, they were "as the children of the

\* Gal. iii. 15. Prov. ii. 17.

† Psal. l. 16.

‡ Rom. i. 17.

|| Rom. ii. 25.

Ethiopians unto him,”\* and in the new testament it is repeated again and again, “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God, faith which worketh by love, and a new creature.”† You boast of your pious parents, as the Jews once did, and claim the privileges of Abraham’s seed, but alas, you may be a “generation of vipers,” as John the Baptist tells them,‡ and “of your father the devil,” as our Lord saith, except you “have the faith and do the works of Abraham.”|| A famous family will avail nothing without personal piety; without holiness in your hearts and lives you cannot be saved; think not that God is bound, and you are loose; the covenant is mutual and reciprocal, you cannot expect the privileges without performing the conditions.

3. It is a distressing observation, and often proves too true, that if the children of God’s people turn apostates they become the worst of men, and run deeper into sin, and further from God than many, yea, any others. The sons of good old Eli ran into unparalleled wickedness, 1 Sam. ii. 12, 22. We have many sad instances of Cain, Ham, Ishmael, Esau, Amnon, and Absalom; of Solomon, Rehoboam, and Manasseh, and few recovered, and with great difficulty. The tribe of Dan, Jacob’s son, turned idolaters, and scarce ever returned to God, therefore are not reckoned amongst the “sealed ones,” Rev. vii. 5—8; because they set up Micah’s graven image, and had Jonathan, the son of Gershom, as priest to the tribe of Dan, and his sons after him, until “the day of the captivity of the land,” Judg. xviii. 30, 31. The Israelites are said to overpass the deeds of the wicked,§ that is, of hea-

\* Amos ix. 7.

† 1 Cor. vii. 19. Gal. v. 6. vi. 15.

‡ Matt. iii. 7—9.

|| John viii. 33, 44. § Jer. v. 28.



thens ; yea, they go beyond Sodom and her daughters, and change God's judgment more than the heathen.\* The reason is clear, because they sin against more light, love, helps, means, convictions, pious examples, as well as a good education, and therefore are justly forsaken of God, and left to greater abominations. Oh tremble lest this be your case !

4. The children of pious parents may be cast into eternal torments. Abraham the father of the faithful may have a son lifting up his eyes in tormenting flames.† The children of the kingdom shall be cast out into "outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth,"‡ they that would not weep penitently here, must weep despairingly hereafter ; they that scorned rebukes from parents, must have dreadful rebukes from God and conscience, their education was with saints, their conclusion with devils. There have many gone to hell with baptismal water on their faces. Baptized Magus must perish with his money ; he was in the "gall of bitterness, and bonds of iniquity,"§ and thus dragged to hell. Yea, the damnation of such sinners will be characterized with more vengeance than others ; the worm of conscience will bite harder, being fed with more materials to strengthen her ; the flame will be hotter, having more fuel ; the higher men are exalted towards heaven, if they reach it not, the lower do they fall to hell, and in hell ;¶ if they plead their birth-right, as when a criminal pleaded that he was a gentleman, and the judge told him, he should therefore have a higher gallows ; or as lord Sturton, who was hanged for murder in a silken halter ; so must these well-bred persons be dealt with, the more they know of their master's will,¶ the more stripes are laid on

\* Ezek. xvi. 47. v. 6. † Luke xvi. 24, 25. ‡ Matt. viii. 12

|| Acts viii. 13, 20, 23.

§ Matt. xi. 23.

¶ Luke xii. 47

them; the more they glory in their privileges, the more misery in their loss, and the higher their hopes, the greater their disappointment; these are both hypocrites and apostates, whose sin and shame are more aggravated and augmented than others.\* O what flaming faggots, and scorching oil, will parent's prayers, tears, counsels, admonitions, exhortations be to dissolute young men! when they shall see their parents glorified, and themselves condemned; read Prov. v. 11.—13.

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## CHAP. VII.

### INSTRUCTION MAY BE DERIVED FROM THE SUBJECT UNDER CONSIDERATION.

THERE are four classes of persons concerned in the doctrine under discussion, who may be instructed in their respective duties from it. *Children of uncovenanted parents, children of covenanted parents, persons married without children, and persons that have a family.*

A few words may be addressed to each of these.

1. There are some children attending on God in ordinances whose immediate parents were not in covenant with God, and knew him not. You may lay this to heart and lament it as your infelicity, but this is no bar to your reception with God; for how can you tell but some of your remote ancestors might be godly? or if not, grace is free, “those that come unto him, he will in no wise cast out;”† you may and must venture;

\* Matt. xxiv. 51.

† John vi. 37.

sinner of the Gentiles are grafted into the true olive, even contrary to nature, when they were wild by nature, so mayest thou be.\* Jephthah was a bastard, thrust out by his brethren, but received by God.† Be not discouraged, though thou be sinful, and thy parents sinful, yet “God is no respecter of persons;” barbarian and Scythian, all are one in Christ Jesus; grace makes, but regards no difference.‡ And if the grace of God hath passed over others’ heads to touch your hearts,

(1.) Adore the sovereign actings of free grace, give God glory, discriminating grace should have the crown set upon its head. I was, may one say, doubly polluted in my birth, from my first, and immediate parents. O what a privilege that I should be permitted to enter into the congregation of the Lord;|| that God should receive me amongst his saints on earth, and give me hopes of heaven, O wonder of grace!

(2.) Be humble all your days, and low in your own eyes. Young professors are apt to be proud, but it ill becomes you of all persons to be proud, whom God hath lifted up from the dunghill, to sit with princes the king’s children, read and apply, 2 Sam. vii. 18—20.

(3.) Make up your parents’ deficiency by your own diligence, what time was lost in your childhood and youth, now redeem; the more ignorant your parents were, the more knowledge do you acquire; the further they were from God, the nearer do you get to him; the more disadvantages you have had, the more pains must you take for your souls, seeing it is of absolute necessity.

(4.) If God have laid hold on your hearts, be more laborious for the good of your families. You have had sad experience of the want of careful education,

\* Rom. xi. 24.

† Judg. xi. 1, 2, 29.

‡ Col. iii. 11. Gal. iii. 28.

|| Deut. xxiii. 2.

let not your children have the same, but instruct them, pray for them, do what you can to bring them into covenant with God, give them not occasion to complain of your neglect also.

2. Children of covenanted parents, God forbid you should act contrary to your baptismal covenant relation, or act inconsistently with your obligations, that thorns should grow instead of lillies, or offensive weeds, where sweet smelling-flowers have been seen; it is dreadful that cursing should be heard, where prayers have been offered, or idle profane songs, where hosannas have been addressed to the King of heaven.

(1.) Review and renew your baptismal covenant. You were early devoted to God in minority, confirm it now at age; you took bounty money to be the Lord's soldiers, to fight against Satan, the world, and the flesh. Beg the graces and privileges exhibited and sealed in that ordinance, "regeneration, adoption, mortification, union to Christ, remission of sin;" say, Lord, didst thou promise before I could ask them, and now wilt thou not bestow them, when I am become an humble suitor for them? \* I here produce thy charter, the deed of gift under thine own hand; thou didst in my infancy confer a right, give me now possession of it, let me know the seed was sown by the crop growing up, that I may at last reap the blessed harvest.

(2.) Repent for your breach of covenant. Alas, I have not come up to my vow in baptism; I have failed by omission, transgressed by commission, my conscience condemns me, God may justly censure me for transgressing his laws, changing his ordinances, breaking the everlasting covenant, † I have abused his kindness, rejected his gracious offers, neglected his worship, and

\* Tit. iii. 5. Rom. vi. 1, 2. Gal. iii. 26. Acts xxii. 16.

† Isa. xxiv. 5.



God may justly draw up a black bill of indictment against me, pass sentence upon me, and execute it as against an apostate; but "Lord, heal my backslidings, love me freely, turn away thine anger from me,"\* and deal with me according to the tenor of this new covenant.

(3.) Plead your fathers' covenant, prayers, and practice; "The Lord our God be with us as he was with our fathers, let him not leave us, nor forsake us;"† Psal. xxii. 4, 5, "our fathers trusted in thee, they trusted, and thou didst deliver them, they cried unto thee, &c." Blessed be God, the God of my fathers, that gave them a believing, praying heart, and signal answers of prayer; I will build on that foundation, and surely my Lord will not be worse to me than he was to them. How strong a plea this hath been accounted, see in David's case, 1 Chron. xii. 17; Jehoshaphat's, 2 Chron. xx. 6, 7; thus may you plead, Lord, my pious father was in many straits, and still he made thee his only refuge, and thou didst not leave him. O cut not off this blessed entail from me his child, be as good to me as thou wast to him.

(4.) Walk in the steps of your pious ancestors, plead and practice as they did, say as Moses, Exod. xv. 2, "He is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him;" "God forbid that I should sell the inheritance of my fathers;"‡ "my fathers' friend I will not forsake"|| by sinning or apostatizing, he never gave me occasion to withdraw from him, "what iniquity have my fathers found in God?"§ shall I disoblige an old friend, to gratify an inveterate enemy? no, God forbid, I will own, love, and serve "the God of my fathers for ever;"¶

\* Hos. xiv. 4. † 1 Kings viii. 57. ‡ 1 Kings xxi. 3, 4.

|| Prov. xxvii. 10. § Jer. ii. 5.

¶ Acts xxiv. 14.

the God of my fathers help me to adhere close to my dear Lord in duty.

3. This doctrine concerns persons that are married, who yet have no children to pray and care for, and in this class, I shall also rank unmarried persons; both these may learn these four practical lessons:

(1.) Be sure you lay hold of this covenant for your own souls, be concerned for yourselves, if you have none else to care for, yet you have a great charge upon your hands; you are either gods or devils to yourselves; either God or Satan is with us, even when alone; yea, every man is the worst devil to himself,\* “every man is tempted when he is drawn way of his own lust and enticed;”† your business is therefore to secure your best interests, whether you shall have children or not; and the only course is to lay hold on this gospel covenant; Isa. lvi. 4, 5, “For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; even unto them will I give in my house, and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters;” mark it, you both secure your own souls and your name. How much is this better than Absalom’s pillar, which became an eternal shame? You obtain honour for yourselves by embracing covenant terms, practising covenant duties, improving covenant promises, and spiritualizing covenant seals, believing in Christ the mediator of the covenant, being sprinkled with the blood of the covenant that you may enjoy covenant privileges; then shall your names be enrolled in the sacred calendar, and “written among the living in Jerusalem.”‡ God and good men will esteem and honour you, yea, your name shall be had in everlasting remembrance; your memory shall

\* Quisque sibi Satan.

† James i. 14.

‡ Isa. iv. 3.

be blessed on earth, and your souls happy in heaven.\* O how much is this better than sons to perpetuate your name? that is but a temporal, this a spiritual mercy; that common to all, this peculiar to saints; that uncertain, this fixed; that temporary, this eternal; be sure of this and you are happy.

(2.) Be humble and mortified. You are without children, they are an earthly blessing,† Psal. cxxvii. 3, 4, 5, "For children are the heritage of the Lord and the fruit of the womb is his reward, as arrows are in the hands of a mighty man, so are the children of youth, happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them." These are not contemptible, though temporal mercies, you must not throw up the head, and say, tush, I care not, I have more ease, and draw a light arrow, I may take my pleasure, and make even with my estate, for I have no family of my own to leave it to when I die. This is perversely spoken, God would have you humbled under the want of children, though but a temporal mercy; God's servants have looked on it as an affliction. You may hereby take occasion to exercise repentance, and inquire what sin he is now punishing you for; thus you may make a virtue of necessity. Your deficiency of family may prove an increase of your graces; but beware of despising the blessing, or taking occasion of revelling away your estates; that is an extreme one way, as penuriousness is unreasonable in you on the other hand; both are sins to be avoided, and mortified; study Col. iii. 5, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness which is idolatry." Away with all licentious practices; live chastely, modestly, moderately, humbly, diligently in all circumstances.

(3.) Adopt some child or children, if you be persons

\* Prov. x. 7.

† Psal. cxxviii. 3, 4.

of any estates; this is Mr. Paul Bain's advice, "they must, saith he, not revel with their substance, nor must they live like idle persons and busy-bodies for want of employment, but they must save the matter of their estate, and depute some as adopted children, and be helpful in educating others;" thus he. Adoption hath been used in all civilized nations, and it is "a passing legally out of one family into another."\* And amongst the Romans it was done either by the pretor or by the people; that which took place through the pretor was called adoption; that which was through the people was called arrogation. They had many formalities about it, needless here to be recounted. But by this means you may have children whom you may account as your own. You rich men, to whom God hath denied the fruit of your bodies, have you no near kinsmen, or poor neighbours to whom God hath granted a lovely offspring? surely it would be acceptable both to God, to them, and yourselves, to select an ingenuous child, to help him to learning, to train him up for God, to make a trial of him while you live, and to bequeath your estates to him; so may you have comfort of him, and he may bear up your name. Do good with your estate, and be serviceable in church and commonwealth. I know some rich men grudge and envy any that are likely to enter into their labours; but as their glory will not descend after them, so usually those estates do no good when they are gone; "For who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool, that shall have rule over his labour."†

(4.) Take more time and pains for the good of your own souls, and lay out yourselves for the good of others; if you be unmarried study that text, 1 Cor. vii. 33—35, "He that is unmarried careth for the things

\* In alienam familiam transitus. † Psal. xlix. 17. Eccl. ii. 19.



that belong to the Lord," how he may please the Lord. Not that married persons have an exemption from soul concerns; but the unmarried have more leisure and a fairer opportunity for immediate acts of devotion. Married persons have some avocations in themselves lawful, from which the unmarried are free. The married may have numerous children, and so have many distractions, which childless persons are not entangled with, and so may be more at leisure for God, or as the words signify, "attend on the Lord without distraction;"\* like the faithful servants who depart not from their master's side. O happy individuals who have a heart and leisure to keep so close to God! you have more time than others, see that your feet and hands, and heart coincide; your opportunities are double to those of others, let your improvement be doubled; you have no children to lay up for, lay out the more for God; he expects more from you than from others. You have no children to maintain, "honour the Lord with your substance;"† buy bibles, and catechisms for poor children, maintain them at school, relieve the poor, encourage a gospel ministry, give the tenth part at least of your yearly incomes to charitable uses; let your own hands be your executors; trust not others when you are dead; for as there are no thanks due to you for bequeathing legacies when you are forced to leave all, so you know not how they will be squandered or disbursed; besides, you lose the opportunity of shewing your charitable disposition. Living springs send forth streams liberally; dead pits afford nothing but what is drawn out with buckets. Watch and seize objects and occasions of doing good. Be sparing in laying out upon yourselves, but be liberal in good uses,

\* Ἐνπρόσδεχον τῷ Κυρίῳ ἀπερὶσπᾶστω. Indivisâ cum Domino conjunctione vivatur.  
 † Prov. iii. 9.

let your superfluities give way to your brother's conveniences, your conveniences to his necessities; yea, your necessities must go to supply his extremities; fear not wanting yourselves; you put all into a good bank; dare you not trust God with respect to bills of his acceptance and notes of promise? If you lend to the Lord, doubtless he will repay; do you fear the all-sufficient God will turn bankrupt? Consult the experience of God's servants, and see if the Jewish proverb have not proved true, Pay thythes that thou mayest be rich.\* Remember what our Lord saith, Luke vi. 38, "Give, and it shall be given you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosoms."

4. The last consideration respects the obligation of all parents to endeavour to the utmost to bring their children and leave them under this covenant. Alas! what signifies your leaving them great estates, hundreds a year, or thousands of gold and silver, in comparison of this? David was a king, his many sons were noble princes, and Solomon one of the most glorious monarchs that ever the sun saw; so that it became a proverb, "Solomon in all his glory."† David also saw him in peaceable possession of the kingdom, "and the Lord magnified him exceedingly:" yet all this did not cheer up dying David's heart so much as this blessed covenant. That is but a carnal heart that can boast what treasures of worldly riches he leaves his children. The gracious soul would rather bequeath a promise to them, than all the wealth of the Indies.‡ Xenophon tells us, that one being asked, where is your

\* Decima ut dives fias.

† Matt. vi. 29. 2 Chron. i. 12.

‡ Laurence Saunder wrote to his wife: Riches I have none to endow you with, but that treasure of tasting, how sweet Christ is, which I feel, I bequeath to you.—*Fox Mon.*

treasure? He answered him, where Cyrus my friend is.\* Much more may a Christian say, Christ is my friend, and my all. Oh that I could leave him to my dear child! that is the height of my ambition, to have my children gracious and glorified. As an honest minister said, if I should but see the fear of God in my children, I have enough, and myself, wife, sons, daughters, are all well provided for; I need no more.† Oh, that God would set parents' hearts towards the covenant of God! I shall furnish some motives and directions. In the first place as motives, I beseech you to consider,

1. That your children are "children of wrath as well as others."‡ Through you they became men, not holy men, for grace is adventitious. Adam begat a son "in his own likeness, after his own image,"|| not God's, which he had lost. For grace comes by spiritual regeneration, not by natural generation. You gave them a sinful and miserable being! O be concerned that they may have a holy and happy being. They are born in sin; "travail over them till Christ be formed in them."§ If you cannot make them good, yet lament that they are so bad: labour to do them the kindness of being instrumental in planting grace in them.

2. Your children are more inclined to vice than virtue; they are born "like the wild ass's colt,"¶ with a bias the wrong way, and an antipathy in their nature to what is good: for "the carnal mind is enmity against God."\*\* Ælian tells of a courtesan, that boasted she could easily get scholars away from Socrates, but Socrates could get no scholars from her.

\* Οπς Κυρος φίλος.

† Satis habeo satisque mihi, uxori, filiis et filiabus perspexi.

‡ Eph. ii. 3. || Gen. v. 3. § Gal. iv. 19. ¶ Job xi. 12.

\*\* Rom. viii. 7.

Wrong is always before right ; naturally the left hand before the right. Children need not be taught what is bad, they learn that fast enough ; but you will find much ado to drill them into what is good.

3. Yet they must learn divine truths, and their duty, or never be happy. "One thing is needful;"\* if they die as they are born, with their backs on God, they are undone for ever ; they are become like the brutes that perish. But it is better to be a brute, than to be a rational man like a brute. The one goeth upwards to be judged by God, and condemned to eternal torments ; but the sensitive spirit of a beast goeth downwards to the earth.† And though some may think the beast shall not lose its existence, yet it is not capable of moral evil, and therefore not the subject of punishment in hell, as a rational, but graceless soul is. Would you have them to escape a condition far worse than that of the animal race ? Oh, take pains that they may have grace, else there can be no salvation ! Matt. xviii. 3, 4.

They are capable of instruction. For this end was the book of Proverbs written, "To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion."‡ Aristotle indeed saith, that a young man is not a fit hearer of moral philosophy, or of ethics ; but he speaks of what is usually, not what ought to be.|| Children can learn games and trades, why not scriptures and catechisms ? It is not enough to describe the capacity of many children ; were they idiots or natural fools, destitute of common reason, it were a lamentable judgment of God, and a sore affliction to parents ; but they have members of body, and use of reason. Oh, do what you can to obtain grace !

\* Luke x. 42.

† Eccl. iii. 21.

‡ Prov. i. 4.

|| De facto, non de eo quod fieri debet.



You are taken with their outward features, wits, or parts; these qualify them not for heaven, till God's image be superinduced.

5. Parents have great advantage in beginning with their children whilst young: now their minds are tender, soonest impressed, like young twigs speedily bended, or a young horse easily broken, or a young hawk soonest brought to the lure. Take them betimes, before they be hardened in sin, and you may most likely prevail; but if they be let alone awhile, they will be past dealing with. Custom in sin makes them like the "Æthiopian with his skin, or the leopard with his spots."\* Besides, teach them betimes, and they will more likely retain it. It is a usual saying, children's memories are soft, and readily take impression, and being clear or free from disturbance, retain it longest.† Season a new vessel, and it will keep the savour long.‡ Let cloth be dyed in wool, and afterwards in cloth, the colour will be most lively and durable. The application is easy.

6. Parents are entrusted with their children's souls as well as bodies. "All souls are mine,"|| saith God, and he commits them to the tuition of parents as a precious talent, or depositum, saying as Pharaoh's daughter to Moses' mother, "take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages."§ So when the child is born and baptized, God saith to parents, I devolve the charge of this child on you, look to it, if it miscarry through your fault, its blood will I require at your hand;¶ you must give an account for its soul; go then to God and say as Manoah concerning his son Samson, "How shall we order the child?

\* Jer. xiii. 23.

† Liquidæ sunt puerorum memoriae.

‡ Quo semel est imbuta recens servabit odorem testa diu.

|| Ezek. xviii. 4.

§ Exod. ii. 9.

¶ Ezek. iii. 18.

And how shall we do unto him?"\* Fetch your instructions from God, and assistance also for your children's good, think of a reckoning day.

7. By this you will manifest your own sincerity or deficiency, your love to God and your children, or your hatred; remember, no man is really good, who is not relatively good; "When thou art converted strengthen thy brethren,"† saith our Lord, that is, evidence the sincerity of thy conversion, by endeavouring after the good of others. Grace is like fire that turns what it toucheth into its own nature; if you do not your endeavour to bring others, especially your offspring, into covenant, it is a shrewd sign that you are not yourselves in covenant with God; then woe be to you, O wretched parents of wretched children! Are you so indifferent whether Christ's kingdom be reared and erected in your family, that you will scarce put up a prayer, or speak a word to promote it? Where is your love to Christ that loved souls so dearly? And where is your true love to your natural offspring? If a beast be fallen into a pit, will you not help him out? Hast thou more care of an animal than the soul of thy child?

8. Satan lies at the catch for your children, that fiend of hell hunteth daily for the precious soul of thy dear child; he got possession when he came into the world, and he makes it his business to keep possession, and will do till Christ, who is "stronger than he,"‡ cast him out; and wilt thou, man, see a dog, a bear, the lion of hell hurry away thy child, and not cry out to heaven for aid? O hard-hearted being! doth not nature teach the hen to fly at the glede that would take her chickens, even the sheep to turn upon the dog that would seize her lamb? And art thou so far degenerated as to cast off all pity for thine own bowels?

\* Judges xiii. 12.

† Luke xxii. 32.

‡ Luke xi. 22.

O monster of mankind! hast thou laid aside humanity, as well as christianity?

9. The church and commonwealth require this office of love from you in relation to your children; and if you neglect their education you take a course to corrupt both. It is worth observing, that the heathen Romans in their courts of judicature, brought actions against such persons as were not careful in educating their children; Cicero laid this to the charge of Verres, that he had debauched his son, by intemperance, riot, and lewdness; it seems it was actionable among heathens, and it were well if it were punished among pretended Christians. Woe be to that town where the springs are poisoned; sad is the case of that church and state where academies and inns of court are corrupted, yea, corrupters, where strange children are born and brought up;\* no reformation can be expected till public schools be reformed. It is said of Protagoras that he lived sixty years, and forty years in corrupting youth; if not only old trees in an orchard be rotten but young also, what fruit can be expected? it is fit they should be digged up, by this we may divine what would become of a church or kingdom without education. Consider,

10. The painful consequence of parents' neglecting the education of their children. "A child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame," Prov. xxix. 15; throw the reins on a child's neck, and whither will he not run? "A foolish son is the heaviness of his mother," and the "calamity of his father;" neither father nor mother has joy in a wicked child, and usually they may thank themselves for it.† The Switzers had a law, that if a child was condemned to die, the parent should execute him, because though a pious man may

\* Isa. i. 4. Hos. v. 7.

† Prov. x. 1. xix. 15. xvii. 21.

have a bad son, yet it is neglect in parents which is usually the ruin of their children. O what shame will cover the face, and horror fill the conscience of a bad father, or a good father conscious of guilt, when he shall see his child running the downward road to everlasting woe ! I advise you therefore to a timely care to prevent these dreadful consequences.

But what course should parents take that sin may be restrained in their children, and that they may be principled with grace, and brought within the covenant of God ?

I answer this is an extensive and ordinary topic on which I cannot now insist. Practical divines lay four great duties before parents, for the bringing up of their children: *provision, correction, instruction, and prayer.*

1. Providing food, raiment, and a calling. This, though a great duty, I pass as belonging not to our case ; only I find this remarkable passage, that the Athenians ordered in their laws, that if parents had not brought up their children in a lawful calling, the children should not be bound to keep their parents. Thus all were set to trades.

2. Correction. Here I shall not enlarge, only observe, that it should be done seasonably, Prov. xix. 18, "Chasten thy son while there is hope," some put it off till children become too stubborn ; do it with self-reflection, humiliation, moderation, and prayer, instructing them respecting their fault, and the way to mend it. I pass this.

3. Instruction. If I had more leisure, I might treat, at length, both on the *matter*, and the *manner* of performing the duty, something however may be said,

(1.) As to the *matter*. Instruct your children in the main fundamental principles of our christian religion, namely, that there is a God, concerning his na-



ture and perfections; the persons of the God-head; the creation of the world, and of man; the immortality of the soul, the nature of sin, the fall of Adam, and the sad fruits thereof; the remedy by Christ, his humiliation, offices, exaltation; the duty of man; the nature of a church; the privileges and character of believers; the ordinances; the state of all men after death; rewards and punishments, &c.

You are likewise to instruct them relative to the covenant of grace; the nature, use and ends of it; the difference between this and the old covenant of works; the mediator of it; the terms, privileges and conditions thereof; the seals of it, baptism and the Lord's supper; the importance and necessity of souls being within it; press them with arguments to enter into it, give directions about it.

(2.) With respect to the manner of instructing your children. You must do it—early, as soon as they are capable, when only drawn from the breasts, that they may suck in knowledge with their mother's milk, as Timothy.\*—Frequently, once is not enough, but you must inculcate truths on them, whet them, as you go oft with the knife to the whet-stone, so the word signifies.†—Experimentally, not by rote or hearsay, work things on your hearts, learn and speak the truth as it is in Jesus;‡ speak feelingly, from the heart, as one that believes himself.—Wisely; observe the tempers of your children, some must be drawn, others driven, provoke not the tender-hearted to fretting or discontent.||—Seasonably; observe proper yielding seasons, as a good humour, affliction or conviction, speak to them words upon the wheel, or at some favourable time when they will be best taken.§—Kindly, winningly,

\* Isa. xxviii. 9. 2 Tim. iii. 15. † Deut. vi. 7. ‡ Eph. iv. 21.

|| Jude 22, 23. Col. iii. 21. § Eccl. viii. 5. Prov. xxv. 11.

meekly, not in a passion, but draw with cords of love, oil them with affection, and they will go gently; even bitter pills coated with sugar will be well taken.\*

—Plainly and familiarly, not in high-flown language, but using similitudes, speak as they are able to hear, come on gradually, by drops, here a little and there a little.†—Faithfully; search the wound, do not skin it over, a tender hand makes a foul wound, a weak dose rather stirs, than purgeth out bad humours, rebuke sharply.‡—Scripturally; bring your authority along with you, shew them chapter and verse, God's authority joined with yours may prevail much, these are spiritual weapons.||—Devoutly; pray solemnly§ by ejaculation before instruction; it is not your work but God's to make it successful; be sensible that all is lost if God commence not by striking with the great hammer, the hammer of his quick and powerful word.

4. The last duty of parents in reference to their surviving children is prayer. This is a natural duty, and a general relief to the aching hearts of pious parents, not only for obtaining children, as in the case of Hannah, but for grace in children, when they go astray; hence it was that holy Abraham, with whom this covenant was first made, breathes out his longing soul in a short ejaculation for his wild son, "O that Ishmael might live before thee!" Gen. xvii. 18, as if he had said, I thank God for Isaac, but I am not satisfied with Isaac only, I must beg spiritual and eternal life for my extravagant son Ishmael, though he be not the son of the promise, yet let him be a son of promise; if Isaac must have the earthly Canaan, let not Ishmael be excluded out of the heavenly. Thus must you plead with the Lord for children.

\* Hos. xi. 3, 4. † Isa. xxviii. 10, 11. ‡ Luke xix. 22. Tit. i. 13.

|| Acts xviii. 24, 28. 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. § Rom. x. 1.

To assist you herein, I shall subjoin some pleas, arguments, and encouragements, not to move God, but to quicken your faith, hope, and importunity. Thus then say :—

(1.) Lord, this covenant which thou hast made with believers and their seed, did spring only from the fountain of thy free grace; this promise commenced before I had a being, and therefore could not depend on any worthiness in me. The Lord did not set his love on Israel because they were better than others, but because he loved them,\* the love of benevolence produced the love of complacency, it is an everlasting love both in its origin and duration; † it hath no cause but in God's breast, and shall have no end. Lord, for thy word's sake, yea, "for thy servant's sake," namely, Christ, who is God's essential word, and according to thy own heart, hast thou done all these great things; ‡ hadst thou seen any obstruction on my part, thou wouldst have forborne making this covenant. But such a covenant there is, and as grace made it, so let grace perform it.

(2.) Lord, thou art true and faithful in the performance of thy promises. Mercy made this covenant with Abraham, truth performs it to Jacob; thou art not as man that thou shouldst lie, thou hast sworn by thy holiness that thou wilt not lie unto David. || Well, Lord, in hopes of the performance of thy covenant, I gave up my children to thee in baptism, wherein thou tookest them as thine own, and dost thou now repent of thy choice? O no, thou hast told me in thy word, that thy covenant promises are as sure as the waters of Noah not again overflowing the world; yea, the moun-

\* Deut. vii. 7, 8.

† Jer. xxxi. 3.

‡ 2 Sam. vii. 21, compared with 1 Chron. xvii. 19.

|| Mic. vii. 20. Numb. xxiii. 19. Psal. lxxxix. 35.

tains and hills will sooner depart, than God go back from his word. His covenant is as sure as the ordinances of heaven, sun, moon, and stars; as sure as day and night.\* Lord, my soul having got such good hold of thee by faith, I will not let go this hold, but adhere to thee till thou make good thy promise to me and my offspring; I am resolved to plead thy bond, by faith and prayer, till thou pay this debt.

(3.) Lord, thou hast made this covenant good to others; thou hast performed the mercy promised to our fathers, and remembered thy holy covenant; there hath been a performance of the things spoken by the Lord;† never could any stand forth, and charge thee for breach of promise, from the beginning of the world to this day; and I humbly hope thou wilt not begin with me. Thou madest a promise to Abraham of a numerous offspring and the possession of Canaan;‡ and thou didst perform all to a tittle, yea, to a minute, the least iota did not fail or fall to the ground; and thou art as great, as good, as powerful, as merciful now as ever. Thou sayest, “Is any thing too hard for the Lord?” My soul echoes, no: I know that thou canst do every thing.|| With God all things are possible, “I believe, Lord, help my unbelief;” thou art able to bring back my prodigal child, to convert my stubborn child; oh give a proof of thy power in this great concern.

(4.) Lord, thou hast made good the promise to my own soul; my parents improved and pleaded thy covenant for me, a sinful creature, and wilt thou not make the same good to mine? I must say as once Solomon did, “Thou hast kept with thy servant David my father, that which thou promisedst him; thou

\* Isa. liv. 9, 10. Jer. xxxi. 35—37. † Luke i. 45, 55, 72.

‡ Gen. xiii. 16. xvii. 6—8. || Gen. xviii. 14. Job xlii. 2.



spakest also with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thy hand, as it is this day.”\* Blessed be the God of my fathers, that hath not cut off his kindness from me, who am the seed of those faithful ones that are now at rest with thee. I myself can rise up and bear witness to thy faithfulness. Behold a testimony of divine love ; thou hast “ shewed me a token for good,” who am “ the son of thy handmaid ;”† and I take this as a pledge of more kindness to mine ; thou hast loosed my bonds,‡ wilt thou not also knock off the fetters of sin from my poor child ? I was as wicked as any, and cost my father and mother many a groan, but thou heardest their prayer, wilt thou not also hear me ?

(5.) Lord, I do find all that I want for myself and children within the compass of the covenant ; for as thou hast promised to be my God, and to pardon sin, so thou hast undertaken to work the conditions thou requirest, as absolutely necessary for obtaining the privileges of the covenant. Thou sayest “ They shall all know me from the least to the greatest of them ;”|| that is, as I understand it, young as well as old. Thou sayest, “ The Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God.”§ Again thou sayest, “ They that dwell under his shadow shall return ;”¶ amongst whom are children ; and that “ He will turn the hearts of the fathers with the children.”\*\* This is enough Lord ; may my children be savingly converted, I have all my desire, for this shall be their salvation ; and I have these promises under thy hand, and surely they are not insignificant.

(6.) Besides, Lord, thou hast converted some whose

\* 1 Kings viii. 23, 24. † Psal. lxxxvi. 16, 17. ‡ Psal. cxvi. 16.

|| Jer. xxxi. 34.

§ Deut. xxx. 6.

¶ Hos. xiv. 7.

\*\* Mal. iv. 6. So some read it.

immediate parents were not in covenant, and whether their remote parents were so, who can tell? I plainly discern thou sometimes steppest out of the ordinary course, reaching over the heads of some more nearly related, to lay hold on strangers' hearts, and I do not grudge them this mercy, but adore the freeness of divine grace; only my soul fetcheth some encouragement thence, will my Lord "graft into the true olive" some "wild branches," and not take in those which are natural? Wilt thou say, *ammi* my people, to them that were not thy people,\* and wilt thou say *lo ammi*,† to such as cling to thee, and are resolved not to let thee go? O my Lord, the exuberancy of free grace to strangers is an encouragement to me; and thus I say, will my father give such large portions of bread to dogs, and can he not afford a crumb to a child? I see some, whose parents never spake a word to God for them, eminent in religion, and monuments of free grace, and shall any of my children, which thou hast taken into thy family, be shut out of thy doors? I hope not.

(7.) Lord, if thou hadst a design to deny my suit thou wouldst have shut my mouth in prayer; for thy word saith, "Thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear."‡ An enlarged heart in prayer is not only a means, but a pledge of gracious audience; surely thou wilt not send thy Spirit into my heart, and draw out my heart to thee in vain; when a father bids his child ask, he designs to give: thou wilt not let this blessed Spirit breathe in vain in my soul. Wilt thou enlarge my heart, and not grant my request? Lord, all my desire is before thee, and my groaning is not hid from thee."|| In thee, O Lord, do

\* Rom. xi. 17, 23. Hos. ii. 23.

† Not my people.

‡ Psal. x. 17.

|| Psal. xxxviii. 9, 15.

I hope ; thou wilt hear me, O Lord, my God." Thou hast raised my heart in expectation, wilt thou not give me the mercy I expect ?

(8.) Lord, is not thy glory concerned in this affair as well as my comfort? and even my comfort is something in thine eye ; for thou sayest, "The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous."\* And alas ! what joy can there be in a family, when a foolish son is heaviness both to father and mother, and a disturbance to the whole house?† But oh ! thy name is dishonoured by my own flesh ; wicked men hardened ; some scandalized by the mis-carrying of the children of the covenant. And on the other hand, if covenant grace be spread upon my child's heart, by converting grace, many will "glorify God."‡ His own soul will be the lively trumpet of divine glory, by confessing sin, and turning to God ; thy omniscience, grace, and omnipotence, will be made glorious. And who can tell how many may be won to God by his example? and every convert "glorifies God in the day of visitation," and at the great day God will be "glorified in his saints."|| Lord, consult thy glory !

(9.) Lord, thou hast given me some encouragement concerning this child I am praying for. When my child was young he was very hopeful ; now he is grown up, my hopes are obscured ; he hath now embraced the world, he hath fallen into bad company and courses ; the less are my hopes now, because he is a criminal apostate, and sins against more light than others, this daunts and damps my spirit. However, I will pray and wait still, for what is discouraging to me, is rather an opportunity for thee. "In the mount of

\* Psal. cxviii. 15.

† Prov. x. 1.

‡ Gal. i. 24

|| 1 Pet. ii. 12. 2 Thess. i. 10.

the Lord it shall be seen,"\* when the knife is at Isaac's throat; "the valley of Achor is a door of hope."† When men say, "our bones are dried, our hope is lost, we are cut off for our parts, then the graves are opened,"‡ and there is life from the dead. The case is mine; I am saying as Jonah, "I am cast out of his sight; yet will I look again toward thy holy temple." The other look may fetch the mercy; there is a *may* be in the case. Can a child of so many prayers and fears miscarry?

This brings to mind a passage in Melchior Adamus, De vitis Theol. Germ. pag. 724; it is this, the mother of Hunnius, being with child of him, had a vision, she thought she was in the church, and took up a reed, or a straw, or such a small thing; while she held it in her fingers, it so increased, that she was almost oppressed with its weight, even to death; she again presently saw it turned into a pillar of the temple, then she was eased of her burden. This was verified in her son Hunnius, who though religiously educated, and hopeful in childhood, yet fell into bad company, and then into horrible temptations, and a sad apprehension that he had committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, but by grace was recovered, and proves an excellent instrument in the church of God. This may be of use to poor afflicted, desponding parents.

(10.) Lord, if thou deny my suit, and glorify thy justice, in the rejection and condemnation of my child; I must and will acquiesce in thy sovereign, righteous will. It is hard to bring my heart to do it, but I will say, Thy will be done. "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are thy judgments, and thy ways past finding out?" || I myself deserve to be forsaken and cast

\* Gen. xxii. 14. † Hos. ii. 15. ‡ Ezek. xxxvii. 11, 12. || Rom. xi. 33



into hell. I have many a time told thee, I must for ever justify thee, if thy justice be glorified in my destruction for all my abominations; and if thou deal thus with my beloved offspring, I will say, "The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works." Righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto me and mine confusion of face.\* I submit my all to thee, and thank thee for grace in my own soul, and hopes of glory; and if my wilful child may not bring a revenue of glory to free grace, I will be submissive.

But say you, what tender-hearted parent can be contented to see his child lost?

[i.] You must distinguish betwixt nature and grace. Nature loves its own, and cannot bear to see part of itself in misery. Yea, grace cannot but desire, cannot but earnestly breathe after the spiritual and eternal good of our children. And it is not only lawful, but our duty to desire it: yet if God deny it, grace brings man's will to a due submission to the divine disposal; for the more a Christian is like to God, the more is his will melted into God's will; and therefore will a child of God say, *Amen*, on the execution of God's justice upon relatives at the great day. As sanctified Levi in the cause of God, said to his father and his mother, "I have not seen; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children."† Nature will be in a sort swallowed up by grace in God's good pleasure. A religious gentlewoman had a vicious son, who fell into many debaucheries, and into one heinous act, which sunk her tender spirit; but recovering herself, she said to him with some warmth, Ah, my depraved son, thou hast cost me many a tear and groan, and bitter hour, but a day is coming when I shall triumph in seeing the just vengeance of God executed upon thee;

\* Psal. cxlv. 17. Dan. ix. 7. † Deut. xxxiii. 9.

this did so appal the young gentleman, that he laid it to heart, repented, and became a new man, to the joy of his pious mother. But,

[ii.] You must consider a state of final condemnation, in a double light.—As a state of unchecked sinning, blaspheming and hating of God to the utmost. God calls you not to be content with this, which is so directly contrary to the grace of God in the Christian; nor yet may you be content to have your child separated from God, the chief good; which is the worst part of hell. But,—Hell may be considered as a place or state of torment and misery, to the rational creature; and on this account, though you cannot have satisfaction in having your child tormented, which is abhorrent to nature, but your souls must be so overruled with the divine pleasure, as that, where his will is manifested, you must rest satisfied with that by which God thinks proper to glorify himself.

(11.) Yet further, say, Lord, if thou refuse to hear me for this or that particular child, yet I will thank thee for free grace displayed towards another child, or more of my children that are hopeful. God forbid, that my sorrow for our child should drown all my comfort in another, or my complaints should silence my gratitude; I will praise thee for what I enjoy, and hope for more. Nature teacheth persons to beg a future, by acknowledging a former kindness. I bless the Lord, I have a praying, obedient child, that was born as destitute of grace as this, and I humbly take this as a pledge of more; thou hast grace enough for all my children, I will not despond, but be thankful; such a child I hope, hath embraced the covenant of God. “Who am I, O Lord God! and what is my house? that thou hast brought me hitherto; and this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God! but

thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come ; and is this the manner of man, O Lord God?"\* thou didst not owe me any thing, and yet thou hast given me the best things. It is true I have a Cain, yet I have a righteous Abel, I have a Shem as well as a Ham, an Isaac as well as an Ishmael, a Jacob as well as an Esau, a Solomon as well as an Amnon or Absalom. All my children were born in sin, and God might have suffered all to have died in sin ; but blessed be free grace, that hath plucked this or that as a brand out of the fire ; God hath heard prayer and taken of my seed to be the Lord's, he hath not dealt so with all families. I own this as a higher preferment for my children than if they were the greatest princes on earth, I will be thankful for them, yet jealous of them, and mix my praises with prayers, the heart is very deceitful ; I will give God glory, yet not glory in my children. But my jealousy shall not obscure the glory of this mercy ; Ebenezer, hitherto God hath helped ; I will rejoice with trembling ; something God hath done that I may love and praise him, and be encouraged to hope for more ; much is yet to do that I may still have an errand to the throne of grace, thus my Lord keeps me in a waiting, depending posture, I must have something to evidence that God is my God, and a hearer of prayer ; I must not have all, that I may know I am on earth, and not in heaven. It may be religion may live in my family when I am dead and gone ; and if all my offspring be not happy, I hope some may ; however, God hath done my own soul good, and laid a foundation of grace in my heart, and will lay the top-stone in glory. It was a notable speech of a gracious minister of Christ, Mr. Avery ; † passing to New England, in a storm at sea, expecting every wave

\* 2 Sam. vii. 18—20.

† See the life of Mr. Mather, pag. 131.

to bring death, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Lord, I cannot claim preservation of my life, but according to thy covenant I claim heaven; immediately a wave wafted him to heaven—he, his wife, and five children, being then drowned. And is this nothing that thou mayest with gratitude and confidence claim a promise for thy own salvation, if it reach no farther?

(12.) Lastly, Lord, notwithstanding all the discouragement I have, I will believe, hope, and pray till thou take me off by my own death, or till the death of my child. As I will follow on to know, and love, and serve the Lord, whatever thou do with me, so I am resolved to pray, and hope, and wait whatever thou say to me, for I am sure, it is good for a man both to hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.\* God is worthy to be waited on, even upon my knees, I cannot be in a better exercise. I confess, my dear Lord, I am a poor worm, have a wicked heart, am of polluted lips, and a sinful life; I deserve not the least crumb of bread, or drop of water, I have forfeited my right to all covenant as well as common mercies, for myself and offspring; I have a child bearing my own image, not thine; a child of wrath by nature as well as others, but thou in thy love hast made a covenant with believers and their seed, thou hast brought me into the bond of the covenant; the like mercy I beg for mine, my child must have thy image as well as mine, or it is undone for ever, and it is not in my power to convey it, but thou canst. My daily errand to the throne of grace, is to beg the blessings of the covenant of grace, for me and mine, I will not go from thy door without alms; thou shalt have a troublesome guest of me till thou grant me my request; O remember thy word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast

\* Lam. iii. 26.



caused me to hope.\* Come, Lord, let covenant grace enter into the soul of my child, which is part of myself, and I will take it as done to myself; if I had not the mercy I beg under a promise, I durst not ask it, but thou hast made thyself a debtor, and I will plead thy bond by faith in prayer; thou canst not deny thy own hand-writing; thou art faithful, and wilt perform it to some, and why not to me?

God loves such importunate beggars, and our dear Lord Jesus hath proposed two parables,† to encourage importunity; therefore it is not unmannerly intrusion, but only earnestness and approved perseverance, wherein God most delights; the end thereof is not to move God to alter his purpose, but that our own souls may have the condition of the promise; thus the Canaanitish, or Syrophenician‡ woman cries out for her daughter, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David, my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil," Matt. xv. 22—28; she received a first, a second, and a third repulse, but she perseveres still, and will have no denial, and at last obtained her suit, with a high encomium and large grant, "O woman, great is thy faith, be it even unto thee as thou wilt." Go thou and do likewise. You cannot be too importunate, only do not limit the Holy One of Israel; as long as there is life, there is hope, therefore continue your prayers as long as the children, for whose spiritual and eternal interests you have so much solicitude, continue in the land of the living, and as long as the breath of life animates your own frame.

\* Psal. cxix. 49. † Luke xi. 5, 8, 9. xviii. 1—8. ‡ Mark vii. 6.