

MEETNESS FOR HEAVEN,

CONSIDERED IN

Some Brief Meditations

ON THE TWELFTH VERSE, IN THE FIRST CHAPTER OF THE
EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS,

INTENDED FOR A FUNERAL LEGACY.

AN
EPISTLE

To my dearly beloved Hearers, Friends and Neighbours, and others that will be at the cost to buy, or take the pains to read this small Treatise.

DEARLY BELOVED,

A DESIRE after happiness is so engraven on the nature of man, that it was never made a question whether he was desirous of being happy or not. This needs no proof; all are agreed in this as the end of a rational agent; and therefore at last, *Felicity* was accounted a goddess among the Romans, and St. Augustine tells us, that Lucullus built her a temple; only he wonders that the Romans who were worshippers of so many gods, had not given divine honours to Felicity sooner; which alone would have sufficed instead of all the rest of their deities, which he reckons up, and saith at last of Numa, that having chosen so many gods and goddesses, it is strange he neglected this. But though they at last had got a notion of felicity, yet having no true piety, that veneration ended in the greatest misery and infelicity; nothing but wars ensued.*

This indeed is the case: all men would be happy, but few know the due object and true means leading to happiness. It is possible, (as the same Father saith there) to find a man that is unwilling to be made king; but none that is loth to be made happy.† Indeed most men blunder in the dark, and few find the thing they seek. The same Father tells us,‡ that Varro in his book on Philosophy, who had diligently searched out the various opinions of men respecting the chief good, reduceth

* Vid. Aug. de Civit. Dei, lib. 4. cap. 23.

† Nullus autem invenitur, qui se nolit esse felicem.

‡ De Civ. Dei, lib. 19. cap. 1.

them to two hundred and eighty-eight sects or conclusions ; and Augustine reduceth them to their several heads ; but I pass by heathens who are bewildered in the dark, and know no better. Even professing or pretended Christians either do not understand, or will not embrace the way of peace and rest. “The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand and seek God. They were all gone aside, they are altogether become filthy, there is none that doth good, no, not one,” Psal. xiv. 2, 3. All mankind are originally degenerate ; and few are regenerated. We set out for hell as soon as we are born ; and till converting grace turn us heaven-wards, we go blindfold to the pit. “The whole world lieth in ignorance and wickedness,” 1 John v. 19 ; but there is no such ignorance as that which is wilful. “This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil,” John iii. 19. No man perisheth but by his own will. Men will sin, and love death rather than life. “You will not come to me, (saith Christ) that you may have life,” John v. 40. He that rejecteth the means, rejecteth the end. “All they that hate Christ, love death,” Prov. viii. 36 ; they do both, not directly or designedly, but virtually and consequentially. Most men “observe lying vanities, and so forsake their own mercies,” Jonah ii. 8, as he leaves the east who goes to the west. “My people,” saith God, “have committed two evils,” observe it, it is but one act, yet there are two evils in it, what are they ? “they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water,” Jer. ii. 13. Oh what evil is in the bowels of one sin ! but especially the sin of unbelief. The evil of sin brings on the evil of punishment ; miss of heaven, and you arrive at hell. What madman will refuse this gift which is better than gold ? what beast will rush down a pit or precipice ? But some men make a jest of heaven ; as that bishop, who, when one said, I hope to see you at your diocess ere long, replied, “I fear I shall be in heaven before that time come ;” others, like Martha, “are so encumbered with the world, that they are pinned down to terrene objects ; and answer, as he that being asked, if he saw the eclipse, said, No, I have so

much business on earth, that I have no leisure to look up to heaven : this is most men's case. Alas, the world eats out the religion of many, as the sun shining eats out the fire : so that men are as dead to religion, as if heaven were but a dream ; and as active in sin, as if hell had no fire, or were all vanished into smoke. Nay, it is well if some look not on heaven and hell, as if they were but a fable or romance, a scarecrow to frighten weak-headed people, or the mere invention of designing priests to keep men in awe ; but they shall know one day to their cost, that there is a heaven by the loss of it, and that there is a hell by its torments ; let these ask the rich man in torment, whether there is a hell or not ? The Targum saith, the dispute between Cain and Abel was, concerning a world to come ; and indeed this is the controversy between the faithful and unbelievers ; though the wicked say the creed, wherein they profess a belief of the resurrection, last judgment, and eternal life ; yet it is but notional, not experimental, or practical ; they know nothing of it initially, or by feeling the beginnings of it here, and living accordingly. It is to be feared that the greatest part of mankind will fall to the devil's share. How little are men concerned about a future state ? how many put away from them the evil day ? Some have a foolish imagination that heaven is every where ; that there is neither heaven nor hell but in a man's own conscience, and then they can shift well enough ; for they can shut the mouth of a bawling conscience, and speak peace to themselves ; but how long will either of these last ? When God arms a man against himself, he will be a *magor-missabib*, a fear round about. Witness Cain and Saul, and Judas too, who thought hell was easier than his own conscience, and therefore desperately leapt into it, to the crushing of his body, and the perdition of his soul. They shall find that there is a heaven and hell after this natural life is ended. It is recorded of Peter Martyr, that he lying upon his death-bed discoursed sweetly on heaven ; Bullinger standing by, quoted Phil. iii. 20, " Our conversation is in heaven ; " true, said the sick man, it is in heaven, but not in the heaven of Brentius, * which is no where ; there is doubtless a *cælum empyreum*, called a third heaven, or paradise, into which Paul was rapt

* Sed non in cælo Brentii, quod nusquam est.

in his extacy ; into which Christ was carried body and soul ; the habitation of God's holiness and glory.* It is true, God himself is called heaven, "the heavens do rule;" and it is as true, "God fills heaven and earth;"† and it is true, where the king is there is the court ; but yet God manifests himself far differently in all places ; he is in hell by the execution of his justice, in heaven by the manifestation of his grace, on earth by displaying both, and his other glorious attributes, according to his infinite wisdom and pleasure.

But let vain men please themselves with their fond conceits ; or desperately leap into the other world, it will be well for you and me duly to weigh the vast difference betwixt graceless and gracious souls in this and in the other world, and though men will not believe, because they see not any such difference, yet a time is coming, "when they shall return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not," Mal. iii. 18 ; then all the world must be ranked into two regiments, sheep and goats ; the one at Christ's right hand, the other on his left ; to the one he will say, "Come ye blessed, to the other, go ye cursed," Matt. xxv. 32—46. They that love not to hear discriminating truths here, shall meet with discriminating acts at that day : and can we think that there will be such a difference at that day, and none in this world ? no, we cannot, for "though all things come alike to all," as to common providence in this world, Eccl. ix. 2 ; yet grace makes a difference in persons' dispositions here, and there will be a vast difference in divine dispensations hereafter, much greater than between a man and a brute ; yea, like that which is between an angel and a devil. O that men would study and understand this now ! Grace makes the difference now, and glory completes it.

1. In point of assimilation. "God's children are like their Father now, but shall be more like him at the last day," 1 John iii. 2. Our former similitude is from faith, and so imperfect ; but the latter is from immediate vision, and thus perfect and complete.

2. In point of satisfaction. In this world the weary soul is

* 2 Cor. xii. 2, 4. Luke xxiv. 51. Isa. lxiii. 15.

† Dan. iv. 26. Matt. xxi. 25. Jer. xxiii. 24.

working towards its rest, and doth by faith enter into this rest; yet there is another remaining. Some satisfaction there is in ordinances; but more on that blessed morning, when God's children awake in his likeness.*

3. In point of participation. For God's children are not tantalized, by beholding that to which they have no right; no, they have heaven by appropriation of faith here, so Eph. ii. 6; and by complete possession in the other world, Rev. xxi. 3.

4. In point of fruition. God's children do enjoy fellowship with him already in this world; but alas, "it is only through a glass darkly, but then face to face," or immediately; now it is but rarely, only now and then, but then constantly and perpetually, as "the angels that always behold the face of our Father." Their eye is never off God, even when they are sent on any errands to earth about the saints. It is defective in degree here, but full and complete above. It is often obstructed and obscured here, but above "this glory shall be revealed in us,"† never to be darkened or eclipsed with clouds of interposing guilt.

O ye children of men, prove your Father's will, and yourselves children; secure this inheritance, make no reckoning of the stuff of this world: for the good of the country above is before you, heaven will pay for all your losses, and counterbalance all your disappointments. No matter how your names are written on earth, in dust or marble, if they be written in heaven. Some say this world is but a shadow of that above; look you for the lineaments of that kingdom above, to be pourtrayed on you. Basil asserted one hundred and sixty-five heavens; you must pass by all the fancied heavens of men, "and look for a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God," Heb. xi. 10; take this kingdom of heaven by violence, Matt. xi. 12. Get a copy of your title out of scripture records, the court rolls of heaven, that you may be sure of it, "and lay hold on eternal life," 1 Tim. vi. 19. Heaven must be begun here, or never enjoyed hereafter. Holiness of heart and life is like the old testament tabernacle, an example and shadow of heavenly things. Happiness is the enjoyment of good, commensurate to our desires; and our desires must be suited to

* Psal. cxvi. 7. Heb. iv. 3, 9. Psal. xxxvi. 8. xvii. 15.

† 1 John i. 3. 1 Cor. xiii. 12. Matt. xviii. 10. Rom. viii. 18.

that happiness. Critics observe, that the word [אשרי] which signifies happiness, is plural; not only denoting a confluence of many good things to make one happy, but because there is a happiness in this life, preparing for and anticipating happiness in another. They differ not in kind but degree; that above is the same state, but more elevated; the same book but in a more correct edition, and a larger character. The saints above differ from us, as a man from a child, as the meridian sun from the morning light; we are in the same house, only they have ascended into the upper room; at the same feast, only they are at the upper end of the table; let us make haste after them; they were once as you are, grovelling on this dunghill, but are exalted to a throne; aspire you to the same preferment: it may be had, it must be had or you are undone. Study the way of God, how this inheritance is made over to the sons of men, and that is—by regeneration—by adoption—by donation—by right of redemption;* and they say, he that hath bought a slave may dispose of him as he please, by his will; our Lord made his will thus, John xvii. 24, “Father, I will that where I am, these may be also.” Clear this and clear all, then you are safe; fail in this and you are undone.

But this is not all; you are not only to get and clear up a title to this inheritance, but to press after a due meetness for it, and this is the design of this small Treatise, which was (for the substance of it) preached and written thirty five-years ago, and now revised and published on these considerations:

1. For my own help and furtherance in preparation for heaven, having within a few days, passed to the sixtieth year of my life, the date of the life of Paul the aged; and my Lord only knows how soon my sun may set, though I cannot say, my natural vigour either of body or mind is in the least abated; but I am mortal, and am loth to be surprized unawares.

2. I see a great failure in myself and other Christians who too frequently terminate our studies and endeavours in getting a title, and then think all is well, we need no more; but surely there is much behind; we have abundance of work upon our hands for obtaining *actual* meetness, without which we cannot evidence our *habitual* meetness.

3. I never yet met with any treatise upon this subject,

* Matt. xix. 28. Rom. viii. 17. Luke xii. 32. Eph. i. 14.

though it be of great importance for every Christian ; surely heaven is worth minding, and methinks Abraham's query in another case should be ours, Gen. xv. 8, " O Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it ?"

4. I have observed a commendable practice of some Christians, which is, to order some books to be distributed at their funerals ; the first that I knew of that nature, was Mr. R. A's *Vindiciæ Pietatis*, and some other practical pieces, which by God's blessing have done much good. Such a memorandum would I bequeath as my last legacy to you, my dear people, amongst whom I have laboured above thirty-nine years in public and private, serving the Lord in some measure of integrity and humility, with many tears and temptations, through a variety of dispensations, excommunications, banishments, confiscations and imprisonments ; but out of all these the Lord hath delivered me, and set my feet in a large place, and God that searcheth the heart knows what hath been my design in studying, preaching, praying, and preparing for you a place to meet in, to worship God ; and what are the agonies and jealousies of my spirit to this day, lest I leave any of you unconverted, and so cashiered from God's presence at the great day ; and now at last I solemnly charge you before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that you rest not in a graceless state another day, lest that be the last day, and you be found unready. And I solemnly require of you who have a principle of grace, gird up your loins, trim your lamps, and observe these few rules, and the dispositions mentioned in this small Treatise. I only hint further : be much in the love of God, daily exercise faith on Christ, walk in the Spirit, be solicitous for God's glory, intermit not holy duties, be not content therein without communion with God, mingle religion with civil acts, increase every grace, redeem time, profitably converse with God's children, aim at perfection, maintain tender consciences, keep strict accounts, study the life of heaven, be still doing or getting good, set God before your eyes, trample on worldly things, live in daily view of death, be nothing in your own eyes, be much in heavenly praises ; say, " O Lord, who am I, and what is my father's house, that thou hast brought me hitherto ? What is man ? what am I ? the least and worst of the children of men, that the heart of God should be working for me,

and towards me, in the infinite tenderness of eternal love ; that the Lord Jesus should shed his heart-blood for me ! that the Holy Spirit should take possession of me ! that God should provide such an inheritance for me ! Assure me of it by precious promises, seal it to me in the holy supper ! What am I, that God should ever give me a heart to fear him, heal so many backslidings, prevent total apostacy, pardon all my iniquities, vouchsafe me such valuable privileges, supply my wants, hear my prayers, help me over so many dangerous places in my journey, bring me to the borders of Canaan, give me so many foretastes of the promised land, and tell me the Jordan of death shall be driven back, and that I shall have a safe passage to heaven ; O blessed, blessed be God, all this is from sovereign grace ; God doth what he pleaseth, I would not exchange this hope for the world's possessions ; eternity will be little enough to be taken up in the praises of rich grace." Thus the gracious soul may quickly lose itself in these divine praises and contemplations, as that zealous German martyr, Giles Tirlleman, who in his prayers was so ardent, kneeling by himself in some secret place, that he seemed to forget himself ; when called many times to meat, he neither heard nor saw them that stood by him, till he was lifted up by the arms, and then gently he would speak to them as one waked out of a deep sleep. O that there were such a spirit in God's children ! that our hearts were so intent on things above, as to pass through the world as if unconcerned in it. Then would you be content to leave all, and go to Christ ; then would you not be afraid of the king of terrors, though armed with halberts, racks, fires and gibbets ; then should you have a brighter crown, and higher degrees of glory, and should shine as the brightness of the firmament ; having had the largest capacities on earth, you should have the fullest joys in heaven. I will conclude with the blessed apostle's prayer, 1 Thess. iii. 12, 13, "The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one towards another, and towards all men, even as we do towards you ; to the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints." Amen and amen. Thus prayeth,

MEETNESS FOR HEAVEN.

COLOSS. I. 12.

Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

CHAP. I.

EXPOSITION OF THE TEXT, AND PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

PRAYER and praise are the two wings on which a devout soul mounts heaven-wards. Prayer fetcheth down occasions of praise. These two form a medium like post-offices, to maintain intercourse between God and his children. Paul was a great man in both ; for, after the inscription, subscription, and benediction in this epistle, he begins to praise, ver. 3, then proceeds to prayer, ver. 9, and in the text he again introduces praise and thanksgiving : wherein observe

The duty, praise ; and for what mercy.

In the former, observe the act, *giving thanks*, and the object, *the Father*.

The act, *Ευχαριστοῦντες* ; it signifies a being of a good temper, having a very grateful disposition, and expressing it in words and actions. Col. iii. 15, “ Be ye thankful,” or be ye agreeable one to another, or

grateful, both in conferring and receiving benefits : but here it refers to God.

A few introductory observations may be made on the passage.

Obs. 1. That thankfulness is the duty and characteristic of a Christian.

A thankful return for mercies is the study and inquiry of gracious souls, Psalm cxvi. 12. Prayer and thanks are like the double motion of the lungs ; the air of mercy that is drawn in by prayer, is breathed out again by the exercise of praise. O happy Christian that can and must “ in every thing give thanks ! ” 1 Thess. v. 18. This, saith Jerome, * is a practice proper for Christians, to be heartily thankful even for crosses, as Job was, chap. i. 21.

Here is also the object of this thankfulness, that is, God, under the notion and relation of a Father : God expresses glory and majesty ; Father implies mercy, love, and clemency.

Obs. 2. That it becomes Christians to approach to God as an indulgent Father.

O how much sweetness and endearedness is in this word *Father* ! therefore Christ teacheth us to begin our prayers with *Our Father*. This relation quickens our faith, and engages God’s love, his care, and his power, and all for his children, Matt. vi. 32. There is comfort in a father, much more in a heavenly Father : evil men may be good fathers, Matt. vii. 11. how much more will a good God be a good Father ? None can be so good, and so much a father as he. †

The matter and ground of thankfulness refer to God the Father’s care and kindness to all his children. This is twofold :

* Christianorum propria virtus.

† Tam Pater nemo, tam pius nemo.

Providing for them an inheritance, and preparing them for it.

First, Providing for all his children an inheritance; wherein are four things to be considered :

The nature of heaven, an *inheritance* ;—the quality of it, *in light* ;—the inhabitants, *saints* ;—their right to it, *partakers*. A word on each of these.

Obs. 3. That God as a Father gives heaven as an inheritance to his children.

Here is the nature of this celestial glory ; it is an *inheritance*, partly alluding to Israel's possessing the land of Canaan ; partly to signify that it is not given us for our merit, but of his free grace and mercy, therefore called the "reward of the inheritance," Col. iii. 24, because it is conveyed as by a father to his child, of bounty, and not earned as wages by a servant, due from his master.

All God's children are " heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ," Rom. viii. 17. O happy souls that are heirs to such an inheritance !

Obs. 4. That heaven is a place and state of inexpressible light.

The property or quality of this inheritance is, that it is *in light* : which is meant to describe the light of truth or faith, or that gospel light whereby God's children are savingly enlightened ; or else the light of glory, where there is a perfection of illumination and delight, joy and felicity, for God dwelleth in inaccessible light, 1 Tim. vi. 16. " The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof," Rev. xxi. 23.

Obs. 5. That only saints, or sanctified souls, are heirs of heaven.

Here are the proprietors, the owners of this glorious

inheritance, that is, saints, sanctified souls; it is purchased for them, vouchsafed to them only; others have nothing to do with it; no dirty dogs or filthy swine shall trample on this golden pavement; 1 Cor. vi. 9. Rev. xxi. 27. "Without holiness no man shall see God," Heb. xii. 14. No grace, no glory. The inhabitants of that city are called, yea, are really holy, Isa. lxii. 12. But how come they by this high honour? have they a good title to it? I answer, Yes, they are partakers of it; so saith the text, *εἰς τὴν μερίδα τοῦ κλήρου*, either that which falls to them by lot—then it is the decision of heaven, which is connected with having a part, Acts viii. 21; or else by a person's own choice, "which," our Lord saith, "shall not be taken away," Luke x. 42. This may suggest,

Obs. 6. That every saint of God is already partaker of a heavenly inheritance.

"The promise," or the mercy promised, "is sure to all the seed," Rom. iv. 16. Why so? Because it is by grace on God's part, and by faith on ours: and God will have it so of his good pleasure.

A sincere Christian partakes of heaven,

(1.) *In pretio*, in purchase. The price is laid down for it; "it is a purchased possession," Eph. i. 14.

(2.) *In promisso*, it is theirs by promise, as Canaan was Israel's by promise; and that land of promise was a type of this heavenly inheritance, James ii. 5.

(3.) *In capite*; saints partake of heaven by their union to their Head who is in heaven. "God hath made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus," Eph. ii. 6. O happy souls!

(4.) *In primitiis*, in the first-fruits or earnest. 2 Cor. v. 5, "Who hath also given unto us the earnest of his Spirit." A pledge is restored, but an earnest is retained, because it is part of the bargain. A faith-

ful man will not run back from his bargain, nor lose his earnest: nor will the covenant-keeping God; he is faithful who hath promised, who will also do it.

Secondly, The other branch of the text is not only the providing of an inheritance for his children, but also a preparing of them for that inheritance. Solomon saith, "Wisdom is good with an inheritance," Eccles. vii. 11. Alas, what should a fool do with a great estate? yet it often falls out so, that the worst men have most of the world: but, saith Mr. J. Dalles on this text, "It is not so here as in worldly things, that fall into the hands of those that are most incapable to improve them aright; but God gives a suitable share of true wisdom with this inheritance," as when Saul was anointed king, he was "turned into another man," 1 Sam. x. 6. Alas, what is heaven to us unless we be fit for it? Our dear Lord Jesus who went to prepare a place for us, must also prepare us for that blessed place. In this second branch we have something implied and something expressed.

(1.) From that which is implied, may arise

Obs. 7. That every soul by nature is altogether unmeet for heaven.

2 Cor. iii. 5, "Not that we are *ικανοι*, sufficient or meet (for it is the same word) of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves." Alas, what merit, either of congruity or condignity, can there be in man to obtain heaven? If he cannot think well, surely he cannot will well, or act well, to deserve or fit himself for such a mercy; especially since man by nature is a child of wrath, a slave of Satan, dead in sins, banished out of paradise, hath no heart to look that way, nay, hath enmity in his mind to what is good. God doth all: * the Sun of Righteousness shines on these de-

* *Dignatus est nōs assumere.*

graded souls ; he alone makes vessels of honour : he fills them with the treasures of grace, and fits them for glory : of unfit making them fit, * that is, meet for his glorious presence.

(2.) Here is something expressed, which is held forth in these two observations :—

Obs. 8. That all those, and only those that shall eternally partake of the heavenly inheritance in the other world, are made meet for it in this world.

Obs. 9. That it is a transcendent mercy worth thanking God for, to be made meet for heaven.

Of the two last in their order.

First, *That all those, and only those that shall partake of the heavenly inheritance in the other world, must be made meet for it in this world.*

All that I shall do in the doctrinal part is,

I. To shew what this meetness is ; and then,

II. I shall prove the necessity of it.

CHAP. II.

DISTINCTIONS ABOUT MEETNESS FOR HEAVEN—
WHAT HABITUAL MEETNESS IS—BOTH RELATIVE
AND REAL.

I. FOR a more methodical proceeding in explaining this subject, I shall premise some *Distinctions*, by which you may understand what meetness for heaven is.

1 *Dist.* There is a legal and evangelical meetness. † Since the fall of man, no mere man can fulfil all righteousness, or by his own power attain to any thing pleasing to God ; so a legal meetness is not attainable.

* Inhabiles habiles faciens. † Aptitudo legalis et evangelica.

“ We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God.” *

2 *Dist.* There is a meetness of works, and of the person. † In the covenant of works, the person was accepted for the works’ sake ; but in the covenant of grace, the work is accepted for the person’s sake. If the person “ be accepted in the Beloved,” God owns both person and offering, as he did Abel. But what proportion can the best services of the best men bear to an eternal reward ? nor can human sufferings purchase this glory to be revealed. ‡

3 *Dist.* There is a perfect, complete meetness for heaven. || This only is attained by “ the spirits of just men made perfect :” for who upon earth can say “ I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin ?” Alas, we know but in part, and so love but in part. Even Paul who was perfect in point of sincerity, yet was not already perfect in point of degree, but was pressing forward. § Christians here below are but *in via non in patria*, on the road to perfection, singing the song of degrees, and not on the heights of Zion. Sincerity is gospel perfection, and the Christian’s preparation, together with a progressive motion.

4 *Dist.* There is an habitual and an actual meetness for heaven ; ¶ or, which may be thus distinguished, there is a hereditary right, and an aptitude or actual fitness for this inheritance. My text includes both, and I shall explain both ; for they are both necessary in their place ; and in this sense God’s children are said to be “ counted worthy of the kingdom

* Rom. iii. 23, 24. viii. 2, 3, 8. Gal. iii. 10—13.

† Aptitudo operum et personæ.

‡ Eph. i. 6. Heb. xi. 4, 6. Luke xvii. 10. Rom. viii. 18.

|| Aptitudo perfecta et progressiva.

§ Heb. xii. 23. Prov. xx. 9. 1 Cor. xiii. 12. Phil. iii. 12—15.

¶ Aptitudo habitualis et actualis.

of God," 2 Thess. i. 5 ; and saith Christ, " They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy," Rev. iii. 4 ; and therefore are we exhorted to " walk worthy of God, who hath called us into his kingdom and glory," 1 Thess. ii. 12. It imports a conveniency, suitability, or answerableness in a limited gospel sense ; like children of such a father, as heirs of such an inheritance, as candidates for such an office and honour. There is a (τὸ πρέπον) becomingness appertaining to every calling ; princes, magistrates, ministers, must have an adaptation and suitability to their profession ; so here.

Well then, I shall speak particularly of this twofold meetness. First, of an habitual meetness, which is in opposition to perfect unmeetness, that is, a state of nature, or unregeneracy ; and secondly, of an actual meetness, which is contra-distinct from imperfect meetness ; and both are necessary.

If you inquire, what is that habitual meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light, without which men can never attain to it, or have eternal possession of it ?

I answer, This habitual meetness consists in a twofold change, *relative* and *real*.

1. It consists in a relative change : this also is twofold, namely in justification and adoption.

(1.) The poor sinner is standing at God's bar as a guilty malefactor, under the dreadful sentence of a just condemnation, " for all the world is become guilty," ἡπὸ δίκου subject to judgment before God," Rom. iii. 19. Not a son of Adam can plead innocence ; it is well if we be as the blushing rose, the lily-whiteness is lost. " He that believeth not is condemned already," John iii. 18, " and the wrath of God abideth on him," ver. 36 ; it was on him when he was born, and it abides

still on him, if not taken off from him by justification. Who can think the prince will promote *him* to honour who is under an attainder for treason? He must be cleared of that charge, or he is fitter for execution than promotion; pardon must precede preferment. You must be first in Christ Jesus, and then "there is no condemnation to you," Rom. viii. 1. You must be received into favour before you be promoted to honour. The sinner must be justified before he can be glorified, Rom. viii. 30. Never think of ascending to heavenly glory under a load of guilt; that guilt will shut heaven's gates against thee. The guilt of one sin will bear down a soul, yea, millions of souls to hell; for "the wages of sin is death;" O therefore, what need is there of justification as an introduction to salvation? "You must be justified by his grace, if ever you be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Never think your sins will be blotted out in the day of refreshing, except you repent here and be converted; you must be "justified by faith that you may have peace with God here, and so rejoice in hope of the glory of God."* You cannot think to leap from the bar to the throne; but you must be cleared by order of justice, through Christ's satisfaction in the court of God. This, this is absolutely necessary to a meetness for this heavenly inheritance.

(2.) Adoption. This is another relative change. Alas, by nature we have quite lost our relationship, and so forfeited our filial right to the heavenly inheritance. We are *exules a regno*, banished out of paradise, and there are placed cherubim, "and a flaming sword, which turns every way to keep the way of the tree of life," Gen. iii. 24. Yea, we are voluntarily gone into a far country, have wasted our substance, disowned

* Rom. vi. 23. Tit. iii. 7. Acts iii. 19. Rom. v. 1, 2.

our father's house, are feeding swinish appetites, and feeding ourselves with the poor husks of worldly things; and till we be adopted and admitted again into our father's house, we are not fit to eat the children's bread, or heir the child's inheritance. But God himself hath contrived a way how to settle the best inheritance on such as he finds strangers; Jer. iii. 19, "I said, how shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations? then I said thou shalt call me, My father, and shalt not turn away from me." O blessed contrivance! and will any think to cross God's plan? Shall men's folly challenge infinite wisdom? is not the heavenly inheritance God's own to give? and doth not our Lord, say, "such honour shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father?" Matt. xx. 23. Can you think to wrest heaven out of God's hands whether he will or not? and must he falsify his word to gratify you? Will he set the crown on a rebel's head? or give this inheritance of saints to the devil's slaves? No, doubtless you must be adopted sons, or no lawful heirs. Bastards heir no land. Jephthah's brethren thrust him out, saying, "Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house, for thou art the son of a strange woman, Judg. xi. 2. And what bold intruder art thou, who darest expect to claim such an inheritance as heaven without the relation of a son? Adam it is true, was God's son by creation; but alas, he and we in him have quite lost that sweet relation; and we must either be restored in Christ, God's well beloved Son, or we are like to be banished for ever. "God sent his own Son, that through him we might receive the adoption of sons;" and have you the Spirit of his Son in your hearts, to cry, Abba Father? which elsewhere is called "the spirit of adoption." Tell me not that all

are the sons of God; so were the devils. God will make you know that this is a peculiar privilege, known to very few, enjoyed by fewer; it is the fruit of special love, and is attended with this unparalleled advantage of seeing God as he is; and a day is coming when these sons and heirs in disguise shall then be like their Father;* then atheists that will not believe that there is any such difference among men, and bold intruders, that dreamed of a right, without pretending or proving their adoption, shall be utterly confounded.

2. But besides this relative change, there is also a real change upon those souls that God makes meet for heaven, and this consists in *conversion to God*, and *covenanting with him*.

(1.) Conversion to God. This is expressed in the words immediately following my text, ver. 13, "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." This is a description of conversion, and a preparation for glory; compare this with Acts xxvi. 18; see there the privilege annexed. Observe it, conversion makes saints, and only saints are partakers of this inheritance. If all the men on earth, and angels in heaven, should join their energies together, they could not save one unconverted soul; truth itself hath asserted it with a solemn asseveration, Matt. xviii. 3, "Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." The like doth the same infallible speaker assert with a fourfold asseveration, John iii. 3, 5. I wonder often how careless sinners who are conscious to themselves that never any such work has passed on them, can eat and drink, or sleep quietly, and never so much as ask this question, am I converted or am I not? if I be, when or

* Gal. iv. 5, 6. Rom. viii. 15. 1 John iii. 1, 2.

how did my soul pass through the change of a new birth? What tears and apprehensions, what groans and agonies hath it cost me? What fruits hath it brought forth in me? Where is this new creature, the divine nature, the image and seed of God rising heaven-wards? What stamp, what sheep-mark can I shew, as evidence of God's being at work on my soul, and as an earnest of a glorious inheritance? But if there be no such change, (as I doubt there is not) how can I be at rest? Sure my pillow is soft, or my heart hard, and my conscience seared, when I can quietly hear or read my own doom in such a scripture, from the mouth of the Judge himself, standing at heaven's gates and shutting me out, as if he named me, saying, Be gone, thou unconverted sinner, I know thee not; converting grace never changed thy heart or life; though I often summoned thee, and knocked at thy door, yet thou hadst no heart or desire to turn from thy sinful ways, nor so much as fall down on thy knees, and ask this grace of conversion of me, or use the means for it, or so much as examine whether thou hadst it or not, but wentest on in a golden dream, and now I must tell thee roundly to thy cost, depart, be gone from my presence, thou poor, wretched, undone sinner; this state, this place is for none but sincere converts.

(2.) Covenanted with God. When the glorious day of our Lord's appearing shall arrive, he calls forth his covenanted people, to crown his gracious promises with complete performance, Psal. 1. 5, "Gather my saints together, those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice;" as if he had said, I take little notice of common or outside worshippers, they shall be set on my left hand; but there are amongst you some serious souls that look beyond the ordinance; I have observed them, they have solemnly devoted themselves

to me, and accepted me in a covenant way. These, these are the persons, and these only, that I have taken for the lot of my inheritance, and for whom I have laid up a safe and satisfying portion: but to the uncovenanted soul, or hypocritical pretender to a covenant engagement, God will say, "What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?" Psal. l. 16. What ground hast thou to own me; or to claim any thing from me for this world or another? Man as a creature can have no intercourse with God, but in a covenant way; much less can a sinner expect any good from God, but by virtue of a covenant. But what canst thou say about this promised inheritance, who hast nothing to do with the promises? "For all the promises of God, in Christ are yea and amen," 2 Cor. i. 20. But thou hast never spent one hour solemnly to review and renew thy baptismal covenant, and engage thy soul to God; and since thou art an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, and a stranger from the covenant of promise, by consequence thou art without Christ, and without God in this world, and therefore without hope of a better state in the other world, Eph. ii. 12. But strangers and foreigners, along with the saints, become fellow-citizens of the new Jerusalem, ver. 19. How is that? Doubtless by taking the sacred oath of fealty and allegiance to the king of heaven. By covenant you have a title to all the good things of earth and heaven. Sinner think of this, thou that lovest to be loose, and scornest the fetters of this holy league; thou dost in effect say, I will have none of God, Christ, pardon, or heaven: if I must have them on no other terms than under such bonds and obligations, let them take this heavenly inheritance for me. And dost thou think this golden chain of honour

worse than the devil's iron fetters of sin, and dismal rewards of flames and torments? If you need not God and heaven, be it known to you, God needs not you; but can distraint for a revenue of glory to his justice in your necessary confusion, because you would not voluntarily submit to his terms for so glorious an inheritance.

CHAP. III.

WHAT ACTUAL MEETNESS FOR HEAVEN IS IN THE EXERCISE OF CHRISTIAN GRACES?

SECONDLY, The next general topic on which I am to treat, is to ascertain what is the soul's actual meetness for this glorious inheritance, supposing the existence of the aforesaid habitual meetness, both relative and real. For all a Christian's work is not done when his state is changed, and he becomes a convert or saint; nay, his work doth but now begin as a saint, to obtain an actual meetness for glory. This, this is the business of a child of God: the former hath a remote meetness; this produces a proximate or nearer capacity for heaven. The former renders the Christian's state safe, this pleasant and comfortable. This is the man that hath set all things in order for another world, that hath nothing to do, but to pass over the Jordan of death into the Canaan of heaven; this is the man that is in the best sense meet for heaven, fit to take his flight into another world. Interpreters think this word *ἵκανος*, sufficient, or meet, answers to the Hebrew word דַּי, *dai*, Lev. xii. 8, "If she be not able to bring a lamb;" in the Hebrew, thus, "If her hand find not

sufficiency of a lamb." The word is attributed to God, who is, אֵל שָׁדַי, "God all-sufficient," Gen. xvii. 1. But as God is sufficient and adequate to the circumstances of all his creatures, so by the same almighty grace he will make creatures adapted to his mind and purposes. So then this word is rather to be rendered by *idoneus*, meet, than *dignus*, worthy; yet worthy in a gospel, qualified sense. Observe it, those judge themselves most unworthy, whom God and man oft judge most fit and worthy, Luke vii. 4; they said, "he is worthy for whom he should do this;" but verse 6, himself saith, "I am not worthy thou shouldst enter under my roof." And thus it is with a gracious soul, looking up and seeing the holiness of God's infinite majesty; looking forward and beholding the momentous duration of eternity and purity of heaven; looking inward and backward, and seeing his many iniquities and great deformity. Oh, cries the sensible Christian, Who is fit for heaven? O how unmeet am I for this glorious state, this high honour? It is true, but grace makes of rebels, subjects; of subjects, servants; of servants, sons; of sons, heirs; of heirs he so disposeth and qualifyeth them, that nothing will content them beneath this inheritance of the saints in light; and their spirits shall be so adapted to it, that the great God will judge them "worthy to obtain that world and the resurrection from the dead, and equal to angels, as being the children of God, and the children of the resurrection:" see Luke xx. 35, 36. As the Christian by conversion is a man cut out for heaven, so while he lives he is and must be still squaring, hammering, planing, and increasing his meetness for it; and as God is said to work us for the self-same thing, 2 Cor. v. 5, κατεργασάμενος, by curious modes of efficacious grace, to put sinners into a capacity for glory; as goldsmiths

who burnish gold; and carvers or artificial engravers in wood and stone, who make one part of their work fit another. So also Christians themselves must “work out their own salvation,” Phil. ii. 12, *κατεργάζεσθε*, that is, leave nothing undone which God hath enjoined you to do in this world, in order to a due preparation for heaven. This in general is a meetness.

More particularly, this actual meetness for heaven consists in these four things:—A lively exercise of suitable graces—A clear evidence of our spiritual state—A despatching of work from our hands—A being mortified to time, and longing to be in heaven.

1. A lively exercise of suitable graces: that is, such graces as actually capacitate for glory; it is true every grace doth qualify for glory, for grace is glory begun, and glory is grace consummated. But there are some graces that have a direct tendency to this point, and whereby a Christian doth, as it were, “lay hold on eternal life,” as the word is, 1 Tim. vi. 12, 19, for example,

(1.) The grace of faith, which “is the substance of things hoped for, and evidence of things not seen,” Heb. xi. 1. It ventures all upon a promise; “sees him that is invisible,” verse 27, and represents heavenly objects as close at hand, “and embraceth them,” verse 13, *ἀσπασάμενοι*, drawing the objects to them, as the word signifies. Overlooking or overcoming all these worldly, visible things, faith spies something beyond time or clouds, of more worth than all the world, and hazards all for the obtaining of it. When faith is upon the wing, it soars above the sun, and fetcheth down heavenly realities and incomes into the soul. It acts the part of the spies, and brings a cluster of the grapes of Canaan; even “joy and peace in believing;” yea, “joy unspeakable and full of glory;”

even, when the actings of the faith of adherence are the very lowest the Christian dares commit the keeping of his soul into his Creator's hands; and is persuaded, that "God will keep that which he hath committed to him."* And this composedness is an antedating of heaven. Alas, saith he, I know not certainly how I stand for heaven; I dare not yet say my faith will end in the saving of my soul; but this I dare say, God is merciful to souls; Christ died for sinners; he is faithful that hath promised; the covenant is well ordered and sure, some souls shall be saved, and why not I? I hang on his free grace, I come with tears in my eyes, confession in my mouth, grief in my heart for my sins; I am weary of my burden, and labour in my progress God-wards, who can tell but I may find rest? He hath said, "those that thus come to him he will in no wise cast out;" I will venture this way; I have tried all other ways, but they are vain; it is but losing my labour, which I am sure I shall not, if my faith be but sincere. This soul is on the confines of the promised land; and is meet for this inheritance.

(2.) Hope. As faith brought heaven down to the soul's eye, so hope carries out the soul to this future enjoyment. This anchor is cast into the vast ocean of eternity, but finds sure anchor-hold, for it "enters into that within the veil," Heb. vi. 19. The believer sees heaven opened, and himself in God's time advanced with Lazarus into Abraham's bosom, and is content at present to bear the roughness and affronts he meets with in his way, saying, these things will be mended when I get home. Nay, the scripture saith, "we are saved by hope," Rom. viii. 24. Hope anticipates what is in reversion, and like a young heir takes up

* Rom. xv. 13. 1 Pet. i. 8. iv. 19. 2 Tim. i. 12.

upon trust, and lives as an expectant of that inheritance to which he is heir. Thus the Christian gets everlasting consolation, because "he hath a good hope through grace," 2 Thess. ii. 16. O, saith the believer, divine revelation hath so fully demonstrated the reality of future glory, that my faith no more doubts of it than of going to bed at night, and why should not "my flesh and spirit rest in hope?" Psal. xvi. 9. Why should not then my heart be glad? Why may not my glory rejoice? Yes, "I will rejoice in hope of the glory of God, for my hope will not make me ashamed," Rom. v. 2, 5. I dare venture my hopes and my all on this blessed covenant bottom. "My soul, hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, and that for ever," Psal. xlii. 11.

(3.) Love. That is a grace that shines brightest in its proper sphere above; but the more it is exercised here below, the more of heaven. Love assimilates the soul most to God, and raiseth it to a heavenly life. "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him," 1 John iv. 16. The soul that is carried out to God in a pure flame of holy love, hath mounted already into the highest region, and bathes itself in those pure streams which cheer and transport the spirit into a continued ecstasy. The more love, the more preparedness for heaven. "If love be increased and abound, our hearts will be established unblameable—at his coming," 1 Thess. iii. 12, 13. Yea, the more love, the more of heaven; for what is our love, but a reflexion of God's love? 1 John iv. 19. O, saith the Christian, I feel the sacred beams of the Sun of Righteousness warming my heart; methinks those heavenly emanations have set me in a flame, and while I am musing, the fire burns; when I am praying or praising God, my soul mounts

up to my Lord as pillars of smoke ; I love to be near him, and to be acting for him. O how sweet is every intimation of his favour ! How delightful are some tokens of love that come from the hand and heart of my beloved ! Here is the soul that is meet for heaven.

(4.) Humility and self-denial. Will you believe it ? The lower the Christian casts himself down, the nearer heaven ; but this is a truth, Matt. v. 3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." God makes his abode with the humble and contrite spirit, Isa. lvii. 15. O, saith the Christian, this grace have I found in me, that duty is performed by me, this corruption have I mortified, that burden have I borne ; what do I say ? I have done this or that ; O no, "by the grace of God, I am what I am—I laboured, yet not I, but the grace of God," 1 Cor. xv. 10. I dare not say any thing is my own but sin ; and what is performed by me is mixt with imperfection. I tremble for fear, saith Luther, at any thing that is of myself.* I must not depend on mine own righteousness ; O that I may be found in Christ ! I am nothing, can do nothing, deserve nothing but death and hell. If ever I be admitted into heaven, it must be on account of Christ, his merits upon the cross, and his intercession in heaven. That is an excellent text, Rev. xix. 7, 8, "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him ; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready ;" but how is she ready ? why, "to her was granted, that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white ; for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." Indeed it is no other than Christ's righteousness imputed ; this is the upper garment that must not only cover our nakedness, but the tattered rags of

*. *Horreo quicquid de meo est.*

our own righteousness. Whether that relate to a glorious state of the church on earth or in heaven, I dispute not; but I am sure it is the finest suit that she can put on, she will look well in that only; and woe to them that appear in their best inherent righteousness. Let the proud self-justiciary say, I will not have heaven gratis,* or for nothing, I will pay a proportionable rate for it; then thou art like to go without it, for it is not saleable ware, Rom. ix. 31. But let a poor self-condemning publican come and beg pardon and heaven for Christ's sake, and God will not deny him: "for he resisteth the proud, but giveth grace and glory to the humble," James iv. 6.

CHAP. IV.

MEETNESS FOR HEAVEN, IN CLEAR EVIDENCES OF TITLE TO IT.

2. THE next particular whereiñ a meetness for heaven doth consist, is assurance, or unquestionable evidence of our title to the happiness above; for none is ready to go out of this world, but he hath solid grounds of his safety with respect to another; for doubts create fears, and those fears produce unwillingness to go hence: he dares not die who knows not whither he must go, and he is not meet for heaven, who hath not used God's appointed means to obtain assurance; a thousand to one a soul at uncertainties hath been a slothful, negligent soul; as in a usual way, diligence begets assurance: for so saith the apostle, Heb. vi. 11, 12, "We desire that every

* Cælum gratis non accipiam.

one of you would shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end; that ye be not slothful." So 2 Pet. i. 10, "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure;" and what then? why then, ver. 11, he adds, "For so an entrance shall be ministered to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." A ship may make a hard shift to get disabled into the harbour, with anchors lost, cables rent, sails torn, masts broken; she gets safe in, but with much difficulty; whereas, how gallantly, doth another ride in, to the credit of her master, for a good example to others, and comfort and satisfaction to all in the ship; when she arrives with sails spread, streamers flying, trumpets sounding, and well victualled: surely these come in bravely. This is just the difference between an indolent professor that wants assurance, and an active Christian in his voyage to the blessed haven. God requires this assurance; means are appointed for attaining it; serious Christians have gained it, so mayest thou, and so must thou endeavour after it. You will say, how is it obtained? By what means may a Christian come to the assurance of his title to this heavenly inheritance, that he may be meet or prepared to take possession of it at death?

I answer, in general it must be supposed that you have a title, which is your habitual meetness, or else how can you be assured of it? You that are unregenerate, you have a greater change to pass through before you are capable of obtaining assurance. But supposing this, the following may be regarded as means:

(1.) A holy diligence in increasing, and exercising graces, and in the performance of duty. This I hinted before: acts evidence habits; improving grace is God's

way to clear up grace; blowing up sparks will best discover them; a flame is sooner discerned than a spark in the embers; Christians by stirring up the gift of God become sensible of it, 2 Tim. i. 6. Motion is a good evidence of life; activity for God, and tendency heaven-ward will put you out of doubt. All duties tend to assurance, or spring from it; striving, running, and fighting will be crowned with clear evidence; God loves to reward diligence. To him that hath, that is, useth and improveth well what he hath, shall be given, and he shall have abundance, that is, more grace and the comfort of it; as the collision of of flint and steel begets light, so the acting of grace produces this fruit, namely, assurance. "For the work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever," Isa. xxxii. 17. Now, now, the Christian is ready for glory, when he is in duty, above duty, with God in the lively actings of grace, which is a part of, and a prologue to glory. He is going from strength to strength, till he appear before God in Zion. O happy soul that is thus upon the wing!

(2.) Reflection upon heart and life, and comparing both with the word of God. This is God's way to gain assurance: have I the conditions of gospel promises, faith and repentance? Do those graces within me answer the characters of such in the scriptures? Doth my soul feel what corresponds with the experience of saints in the word of God? Can I follow the rules and prescriptions that my Lord hath laid down, "To deny myself, take up my cross and follow him?" Have I the essential characteristics of a Christian? I dare not believe Satan or my own treacherous heart; I will examine and prove myself, 2 Cor. xiii. 5. I will not spare myself in any thing, I will be impartial, and

deal faithfully by a severe trial now, as I would be found in the decisive trial at the last day ; it is a matter of life and death ; I will lay judgment to the line ; I will go to the law and to the testimony ; the word must judge me at the great day, it shall be my judge now. No matter what the world saith of me, nor must I be determined by the votes of the best Christians, or pious ministers : I must, and will, and do “prove mine own work, and then I shall have rejoicing in myself alone, and not in another,” Gal. vi. 4.

(3.) Appealing and approving the heart to God. Alas, the best Christian is too apt to be partial in his own case, or blind at home ; our minds are placed as our eyes, neither of them apt to look inwards ; and when we do look, alas, we are apt to look through a false or flattering glass, or our eye is vitiated with bad humours ; and therefore must we with Job appeal to God, chap. x. 7, “Thou knowest that I am not wicked.” And chap. xxiii. 10, “He knoweth the way that I take.” And though David “had communed with his own heart, and his spirit had made diligent search,” Psal. lxxvii. 6 ; yet he requests God to make a further investigation : Psal. xxvi. 2, “Examine me, O Lord, and prove me ; try my reins, and my heart.” And again, Psal. cxxxix. 23, “Search me, O God, and know my heart ; try me, and know my thoughts.” Not as though God were ignorant of them till he had searched, but it is spoken after the manner of men ; and that God might further acquaint David with the secrets of his heart. Thus the sincere Christian saith, Lord, I set myself before thee as a glass in the sun ; look upon me, look through me ; thou knowest all things, see how my heart is affected towards thee ; discover to me the inmost workings of my soul ; if there be any secret guile wrapping itself up in the

lurking places of my heart, bring it to light ; if there be any flaw in my evidences, let me see it before it be too late ; I am too apt, through self-love, to judge the best, but do thou declare my state and my frame as it is : thou that must be my judge shalt be my witness. “ My witness is in heaven, and my record is on high,” Job xvi. 19. Here is a soul usually comforted in his integrity, and such a one is meet for heaven.

(4.) Praying to God for the illumination and sealing of his Spirit. For indeed let all these means be used, yet evidence will not appear unless God be pleased to shine upon his own grace in the soul. “ My conscience,” saith Paul, “ bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost,” Rom. ix. 1, and Rom. viii. 16, “ The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.” This indeed is sun-light assurance. This alone scatters all mists, answers all objections, banishes all doubts and fears ; and O what an honour and satisfaction is it to a child of God, that the third person of the sacred Trinity should come down and give his infallible testimony at the bar of a believer’s conscience ! This is like the Son of God coming down to assume our nature, and to die for us. O transcendent condescension ! O unparalleled privilege of God’s children ! Yet this is purchased by Christ, and promised to believers, not only to be a witness, but a seal.* This is often, yea ordinarily given after believing ; and when it comes, it brings its own evidence along with it ; so that the perplexed child of God, after many sore conflicts, strugglings, efforts, and sad thoughts of heart, comes at last to some stability, so as to expel cares, fears, and doubts, and now at last is brought to this, that he no more questions God’s love than his faithfulness : and this usually

* 2 Cor. i. 22. v. 5. Eph. i. 13.

takes place after some extraordinary wrestlings at the throne of grace in prayer, according to that John xvi. 24, "Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name:" that is, very little comparatively. "Ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." God will have his children to beg when he designs to give, to exercise our obedience, and to honour his own ordinance. Then he gives assurance, and the joy of his salvation; and now the believer is meet to be translated into the joy of his Lord.

But you will say, are none meet for heaven but such as have assurance? Then what shall a poor doubting soul say of itself, when dark, and much discouraged as many are?

Answ. (1.) A title to this inheritance is necessary, but knowledge of this title is not absolutely necessary. Many have died safely, though under clouds. Our Lord himself cried, in his dying moments, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" There was relation, *my God*, yet in some sense he was forsaken.

(2.) There are degrees of assurance; accordingly one said, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief." Few enjoy a full assurance, and those that have it, yet have it not at all times. Mr. Paul Bains said, dying, "Sustentation I have, but suavities spiritual I do not feel."

(3.) What God doth in a sovereign way, when he suspends the comforts of his Spirit from the best of his saints, is one thing; and what may be, and usually is, the effect of man's sloth and negligence, and which is too commonly our case, is another; as Mr. Dodd answered him that complained of want of assurance, "why, man, assurance may be had, and what have you been doing all this while?"

(4.) Yet this will hold good, that a clear evidence of

our title is a great meetness and readiness for death ; for though assurance be not necessary [*ad esse*] to the being of a Christian ; yet it is necessary [*ad bene esse*] to his well-being, or comfortable passage through, or departure out of this world ; for if we must draw near to God in duty with full assurance of faith, Heb. x. 22, much more at death.

O what a vast difference there is between a soul carried upon the wing of faith, in an ecstasy of joy, and the poor doubting, heartless, disconsolate soul ! The former is like some high mountains, that are above storms and clouds, as they say Olympus is clear and beautiful. O the calmness and serenity of the well assured Christian ! He hath a double heaven, well at present, better presently ; it is but shooting this gulf, crossing this Jordan, passing this stile, as Dr. Taylor said, “and I shall be in my Father’s house.” Death itself, as terrible as it is in itself and to others, is a stingless serpent, my friend and father’s servant sent to fetch me home ; angels shall guard me, my Lord will bid me welcome, my christian friends gone before will make heaven ring with shouts of joy at my landing safe, and my soul shall ever be with the Lord. But alas, the poor doubting soul, whose evidences are not clear, cries out, alas, die I must, and die I dare not, I dare not say, God is my God, Christ is my Saviour, the Spirit my sanctifier, promises forming the charter that conveys an inheritance to others I cannot apply ; whither I am going I know not ; God conducts himself strangely towards me ; I remember God and am troubled, guilt stares me in the face, I am conscious to myself of thousands of sins, and though I have been long trying to exercise faith and repentance, yet I am not sure they are sincere and saving, or whether God will receive my mournful departing soul : as a

great man said, I have lived under fears, I die under doubts,* and God knows what will become of me, I may however thank myself; alas, this is the fruit of my sloth, my security, my slipping into sin, backslidings from God, intermissions of duty, careless and heartless performances; woe is me, what will become of me! These are the overwhelming thoughts of a poor doubtful, dying soul. And is this man meet for heaven? He may be right for the main, but he cannot make death welcome.

CHAP. V.

MEETNESS FOR HEAVEN CONSISTING IN THE DISCHARGE OF WHAT IS INCUMBENT UPON US.

3. THE next thing wherein our meetness for this blessed inheritance doth consist, is in despatching the main work which God sent us to do in the world; whatever that is, God expects that we should be performing it, and get it done; this we must all apply ourselves cheerfully to do, and be very diligent in doing it, Eccl. ix. 10, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." This only is the time of working, the future, beyond the grave, is a day of retribution; and when the child of God hath wrought his day's work, he goes to sleep in the dust: thus our dear Lord tells his father, John xvii. 4, 5, "I have finished the work that thou gavest me to do; and now O, Father, glorify me with thy own self."

* *Anxius vixi, dubius morior.*

But you may say, What work is it that God sets before men to perform?

I answer, There is a fourfold work upon a Christian's hands in this world.

(1.) Personal, spiritual work, soul work, wherein God is more immediately concerned; which is the glorifying of God, and saving of the soul; God hath combined these, they are inseparable, and it is a mighty business. Our Lord saith, "I have glorified thee on the earth;" this in our measure is required of us, and the sincere Christian makes it his design. Thou knowest, O my dear Lord, what that is which hath lain nearest my heart ever since thou openedst mine eyes: the earnest desire of my soul hath been to be nothing in mine own eyes, that God alone may have all the glory; I will confess and give glory to God; I resolve to do this, and through grace have desired, to make it my business to give glory to God by believing, repenting, obeying, fruit-bearing; yea, in eating, drinking, and whatsoever I do in natural, moral or civil actions. This, this is the mark I have in view, my highest aim, "that God in all things may be glorified, through Jesus Christ;" and my business is in order thereto, to study how to "please God, and to abound more and more;" to obey God's commandments, and to do those things that are pleasing in his sight;* and O that my person and prayers might be accepted in Christ! The salvation of my soul is more dear and precious than this poor, perishing frame. My grand inquiry is, what must I do to be saved? this is the one thing needful, other things are bye the bye. O that I could work out my own salvation! I appeal to thee, Lord, how many griefs and groans, tears and prayers, pains and fears, this main concern hath cost me: I know there is much

* 1 Pet. iv. 11. 1 Thess. iv. 1. 1 John iii. 22.

of this work about my precious soul yet undone ; but thou knowest the chief is despatched. " I have fought a good fight, finished my course, kept the faith," 2 Tim. iv. 7 ; and now my land business is done, let me go to sea, and launch out into that boundless ocean of eternal happiness.

(2.) Temporal work, the business of our callings and particular occasions. This also the dying Christian is drawing into a narrower compass, that he may voluntarily leave the world, before the world leave him. The Christian having had his head and hands full of business in his younger days, when old age comes, is glad of a writ of ease, that he may be at more leisure for God in holy duties. Methinks, saith the believer, I have had my share, both of the employments and enjoyments of this lower world, and am well content to shake hands therewith. I can behold with pity the laborious ants running upon this mole-hill, and busily scrambling for a little dust ; let them take it, God hath made my hands to be sufficient for me ; I have what will bear my charges to the grave ; let it go, I am glad I have so fairly parted with it ; I would not be called to enter again upon this busy stage, or put forth to this tumultuous sea ; I have now other things to mind ; I have now the great work of setting straight my accounts for another world to engage my attention, my peace to make with God, an eternity to provide for, which the affairs of the world have thrust out, or distracted me in. This shall be my employment for the future ; " for what will it profit a man to gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ? " I leave all temporal things to others that succeed me.

(3.) Relative work. This also may be in some respects despatched from our hands ; and the doing of it maketh more meet for heaven. This is not to be

slighted, for it is needful in its place. When king Hezekiah was sick unto death, God sends him this message, "Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live," Isa. xxxviii. 1, that is, make thy will, and dispose of thy domestic concerns, so as to prevent quarrels and contentions in thy family after thy decease; and ver. 3, it is said, that Hezekiah wept sore; why so? was not Hezekiah a pious man? was not his soul in readiness for death? Yes, doubtless, for he dared appeal to God that he had walked before him in truth, and with a perfect heart. What then was the matter? Why, Hezekiah had yet no son, Manasseh being not born till three years after this, as if he had said, Lord, if it may be thy will, spare my life, and give me a son, for if I die at this time, I know not how to dispose of the crown, I am likely to leave the church and state in miserable distraction and confusion, through the great uncertainty of a succession, and the proneness of the people to backslide to their false worship. God heard his prayer, gave him a lease of his life for fifteen years. This is the duty of all, though it be more necessary to some than to others. In every case it is useful to tranquillize the mind, and to prevent outward ill consequences, and inward disturbances of spirit; but as that good man was loth to go off the stage heirless, so other circumstances may particularly call for the settlement of families by a last will and testament; especially when children are left young, &c. Others also may say, now God hath lengthened out my days to see my children brought up, and hopeful for religion, settled in callings and families; there was but this child, or that business that I desired to see well circumstanced, as to my family affairs; as Jacob closed up his blessing of Dan, Gen. xlix. 18, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord;" now at last, since God hath wrought on

such a child, I will say with old Simeon, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation," Luke ii. 29, 30.

(4.) Another work to be disposed of, may be of a public nature. This especially concerns men in a public capacity; as when Moses had led Israel out of Egypt, and through the wilderness, he had despatched his work, and having been faithful in God's house he was prepared to die. So when Joshua had conquered many kings in Canaan, divided the land to Israel, he obtained a discharge and fell asleep. Thus David, "after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers," Acts xiii. 36. And so Aaron, Samuel, and the rest of the prophets, marched off the field by the order of our great Lord General, when they had despatched their warfare, and delivered their message. "Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets do they live for ever?" Zech. i. 5. And indeed to what purpose should they or we live, when our work is done? especially when God's servants have not only despatched that work that concerns present, but future generations; for this is also the work of our present day. Thus Solomon built God a house for future times: and the apostle Peter lays in for after ages, 2 Pet. i. 15, "Moreover, I will endeavour that you may be able after my decease, to have these things always in remembrance." It is the property of a good man to take care that religion may live when he is dead. Ambrose saith of Theodosius, I loved him exceedingly, who when he died was more solicitous for the church's than his own danger. Then indeed is the Christian meet for heaven when he hath despatched his work on earth, and laid a foundation for good in after times.

But you will say, how can any man be said to despatch his work till his life be done? Surely work and life, as to their date, run parallel.

Answ. (1.) What is active, may be oft at an end, when what is to suffer is but beginning; for God often reserves suffering to the last, that patience may have her perfect work, that the Christian may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing, James i. 4. The Christian then hath little to do, but patiently wait God's pleasure; and this usually follows on doing God's will: see Heb. x. 36. It is indeed a great thing to bear our burden patiently, cheerfully, thankfully, and usefully; and say, well for the present, and better shortly; the greatest part is over.

(2.) Though something be still to be done or suffered, yet when the greatest part of a Christian's work is done, it may be said to be finished. So it was with our Saviour, John xvii. 4, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." But was not dying upon the cross for the sins of men a principal part of Christ's work? Yes, only it was so nigh, that he speaks of it as already done; so verse 11, "I am not in the world;" for he was just going out of it. Besides, he had done most of his work, and was straitened to do fully the rest that was behind: "And when our Lord had tasted the vinegar, he said, it is finished," John xix. 30. This is a closing word, as giving up the ghost was a closing work.

(3.) Sometimes divine providence takes off God's children from much of their work before their days be ended. It is obvious to a rational eye that then their work is done: sometimes it takes place by natural causes; thus Isaac and Jacob could presage their own death by a certain prognostic, namely, old age: some are cut off by sickness or consumptions, which are

usually mortal; others are taken from most of their work by persecutions, prisons, &c.; and others are removed from the stage of the world by violent death. As a dying minister said on the scaffold, "Isaac was old and knew not the day of his death, I am young, and know the day, manner, and instruments of my death: it is but a nodding the head, and death doth its office. Now my work is ended."

(4.) Yet once more: some godly ministers and Christians have had a kind of presentiment, that death was approaching even when enjoying the best health and in their younger days; and so consequently of the despatch of their work; as some creatures by natural instinct foresee a falling house. So we read of bishop Jewel, that long before his sickness he foretold it approaching, and in his sickness, the precise day of his death; he died in the fiftieth year of his age. The like we have been informed of James Andreas, who foretold the year, yea, hour of his death. I shall add but another instance of a holy man of God, my dear friend, Mr. Isaac Ambrose: his surviving wife told me of the solemn farewell he gave to his daughter, and some other friends. Yea, the very day of his death several friends from Garstang visited him at Preston, with whom he discoursed piously and cheerfully, telling them he had finished his work, having the night before sent his discourse on "Angels" to the Press, he attended them to their horses, returned, and died that evening in his parlour, where he had shut himself up for meditation. Thus God's children are made meet for heaven by despatching their work on earth.

CHAP. VI.

MEETNESS FOR HEAVEN, BY BEING MORTIFIED TO
SIN, TIME, AND EARTHLY OBJECTS, AND BEING
ELEVATED WITH HEAVENLY CONTEMPLATIONS.

4. THE last thing wherein meetness for heaven doth consist, is a being dead or mortified to all things below, and alive and lively with respect to God and things above. It is true, converting grace deadens the heart to all sublunary objects, and lifts it up to divine things. Yea, sometimes the first convictions take off the sinner's spirit more than is meet, and quite damps the affections in reference to lawful comforts, and makes him think he must do nothing in worldly business, but give himself to reading, praying, and hearing; but God's grace in a little time discovers this to be a temptation. Yet as grace gets the upper hand, and the Christian mellows and ripens for glory, so he is mortified and gradually transformed and advanced.

(1.) By further victory over his corruptions; for as the Christian perfects holiness in the fear of God, so he doth by degrees cleanse himself "from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit," 2 Cor. vii. 1. Sin and grace being like two buckets at one chain, as the one comes up the other goes down; or as the ebbing and flowing of the sea, where it gaineth in one place it loseth in another; the more holiness, the less sin. Now the Christian grows stronger and stronger; "The inward man is renewed day by day," 2 Cor. iv. 16. So the body of sin is weakened, till at last his fleshly lusts are laid at his feet, and spiritual sins pay tribute to the grace of God in his soul. Pride, hardness, un-

belief and security, keep the Christian humble and watchful, jealous of himself, and maintaining spiritual conflicts against them, so occasionally he is a gainer by his losses, and rises by his falls; however the Christian grows more sensible of the burden of sin; as Paul, he cries out, "Oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Rom. vii. 24. Oh, saith the Christian, what shall I do with this untoward heart? I am weary of these daughters of Heth; fain would I get rid of this indwelling corruption. Sin I hope hath not dominion over me; but O when shall the time come that it shall have no indwelling within me? But this is my grief and I must bear it, I am discontentedly contented with my burden, discontent with sin, content with God's pleasure. There is nothing makes me weary of the world but sin; could I live without sin, I should live without sorrow; the less sin, the more of heaven. Lord, set me at liberty.

(2.) By loosening the affections from all worldly enjoyments. O how sapless and insipid doth the world grow to the soul that is a making meet for heaven! "I am crucified to the world, and this world to me," Gal. vi. 14. In vain doth this harlot think to allure me by her attractions of profit and pleasure. "Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother; my soul is even as a weaned child," Psal. cxxxi. 2. There is no more relish in these gaudy things to my palate, than in the white of an egg; every thing grows a burden to me, were it not my duty to follow my calling, and be thankful for my enjoyments. Methinks I have my wife, husband, and dearest relations, as if I had none; I weep for outward losses, as if I wept not; rejoice in comforts below as if I rejoiced not, 1 Cor. vii. 29—30; my

thoughts are taken up with other objects. The men of the world slight me, many seem to be weary of me, and I am as weary of them. It is none of these earthly things that my heart is set upon;* my soul is set on things above, my treasure is in heaven, and I would have my heart there also; I have sent before me all my goods into another country, and am shortly for removing; and when I look about me, I see a bare, empty house, and am ready to say with Monica, what do I here?† my father, husband, mother, (Jerusalem above,) my brethren, sisters, best friends are above. Methinks, I grudge the world any portion of my heart, and think not these temporal visible things worth a cast of my eye compared with things invisible and eternal, 2 Cor. iv. 18. I do not only say with afflicted Job, chap. vii. 16, "I loath it, I would not live alway;" but even with Solomon on the summit of all earthly felicity, Eccl. ii. 17, 18, "Therefore I hated life, yea I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun," that is, in comparison, or in competition with heavenly enjoyments.

(3.) By spiritualizing worldly things, and using them as steps by which the soul mounts heavenwards. The believer considers that these things were made not for themselves, but for higher ends. All things are as talents to trade with for another world, Matt. xxv. 16; for an account must be given of them; not only ordinances and gospel privileges, but providences both sweet and severe, yea, creature-comforts, and all visible objects. Thus our Lord who had grace in perfection, made notable, spiritual improvement of material water, bread, vines, for holy purposes; and the more heavenly the Christian is, the liker he is to his head, and so meeter for heaven. Whatever this golden hand of

* Non est mortale quod opto.

† Quid hic facio?

faith toucheth is turned into gold. The Christian fetcheth honey thus out of the hard rock; out of the eater comes meat. O, saith the believing soul, if meat be so sweet to a hungry stomach, how much more excellent is God's loving-kindness? If drink be so refreshing to the thirsty soul, O how sweet are the rivers of pleasures? surely his love is better than wine. If it be so pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun, how lovely is the Sun of righteousness? How sweet is home to the weary traveller; and the haven to the weather-beaten mariner? but infinitely more sweet and contentful is heaven to the tempted, burdened, tried saint. Methinks all I see, and do, and have, reminds me of my home; and saith, "Arise, depart, this is not thy rest." When I am abroad in a storm, I haste to a shelter. O think I then, that I were with my dear Lord, who is as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land! When I consider my dim eyes, my decrepit feet, my palsied hands, my panting lungs; O think I, when shall this silver cord be loosened, and the bowl broken at the cistern? that my soul may return to God. This is a pitiful, ruinous cottage, when shall I be brought into the king's palace? In this my earthly tabernacle methinks I find now a pin loosened, and a stake taken down, then I say and sigh with the blessed apostle, 2 Cor. v. 4, "We which are in this tabernacle do groan being burdened, not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life." Here is the soul taking wing to fly into another world.

(4.) The Christian is made meet for heaven by intimate familiarity with the God of heaven. This indeed is the height of a Christian's perfection on earth. The fitter for, and the freer the intercourse with God, the fitter is that soul for glory. What is heaven but

the enjoyment of God? the nearer God the nearer heaven; for where the king is there is the court. Truly, saith the apostle, "our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ," 1 John i. 3. Communion with God, and assimilation to God are the life and perfection of our religion; and the former leads on to the latter, 2 Cor. iii. 18, "But we all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord." As grace increaseth, glory increaseth; and the vision of God, though but through a glass, mightily increaseth grace, and fitteth for glory. Now it is said of some great persons, that they have spoken more with God than with man. O, saith the Christian, I could not tell how to spend my time if my soul had not frequently free access to, and intercourse with my best friend above: O that it were oftener and longer;* it were a fine resemblance of heaven to have fixed communion with him; but however, I write that day as black and lost wherein God and my soul are not together. I cannot be content in a public ordinance when I miss my beloved; I follow him into my closet, and there usually I find him whom my soul loveth. O then think I, that God would now stop my breath, and translate my soul into his immediate presence! as it is said of Moses that he died in the embraces of God, Deut. xxxiv. 5; (so some read it, or overpowered with divine embraces) would to God it were thus with me! Methinks, I am loth to part with these first-fruits without a full harvest; now let me go over Jordan, and see that goodly mountain and Lebanon. O let me not return down into this tempting world, to be banished again from thee! O come thou down to me, or take me up to thee. It is a pity

* Sed rara hora, brevis mora.

my soul should be thus tantalized with the sight of that which I cannot at present enjoy ; well, since it is thy pleasure I am content to wait and descend to take my lot with my fellow men ; only I shall be stretching out neck and arms, and be looking for, and hasting to the coming of my dear Lord. Come Lord Jesus, come quickly, make haste my beloved, and be thou like to a roe, or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices.

But you will say, such a height of meetness for the the heavenly inheritance as you have described is not practicable or attainable in this life ; if none be saved but such as you have described, woe be to all the world. I answer,

[i.] Most part of men are not capable of this actual meetness, not having what is habitual : namely, a relation to God, and a principle of saving grace ; and no wonder if unexperienced persons call this enthusiasm, and unintelligible nonsense, for wisdom is too high for a fool ; it is not to be thought strange if some speak evil of what they know not, and turn real experience into ridicule. Alas, they have no grace, how then can they exercise it ? how can they evidence a title to heaven that have none ? how can they despatch their work, that never have begun it to purpose ? or be mortified to things below, who have their portion in this present life, who were never divorced from their lusts, and have no treasure above ? We may pity such souls, for salvation is far from the wicked.

[ii.] Wisdom is however justified of her children. Sanctified souls know what these things mean, and though the best complain of their low attainments, yet the weakest, sincere Christian can set to his seal, that part of these things he hath found in his bosom as to sincerity, and is aiming at further degrees, and is not

content to sit down short of perfection, but is "pressing toward the mark for the price of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus," Phil. iii. 14.

[iii.] There is a great difference in the attainments of Christians in this world. Some active, vigorous souls get nearer to God than others; some are children, some fathers, others are young men, that are strong, and the word of God abides in them, and they have overcome the wicked one, 1 John ii. 12—14. The meanest child God hath in his family will own and follow his father, though some dare not say, he is my father; but some are grown up to great intimacy with God, as that choice man of God, Mr. Holland, who said, on his death bed, "Speak it when I am gone, and preach it at my funeral, that God deals familiarly with man."

[iv.] Yet it is every one's duty to endeavour after the highest pitch of meetness that is attainable in this life; for as it is the nature of true grace, to become deeper and deeper, like the waters in Ezekiel's vision, and ascend higher and higher, as the flame or rising sun; so the Christian dares not but obey God's command to grow in grace, and he sees it necessary to comply with our Lord's direction, Matt. xxiv. 44, "Therefore be ye also ready;" and this is one reason amongst the rest which I shall next add, for what a pious, dying minister of my acquaintance said, "That the best preparation of the best man, is all little enough when we come to die." But more of this anon.

CHAP. VII.

SOME REASONS STATED WHY THOSE MUST BE MADE
MEET FOR HEAVEN HERE, WHO HOPE TO BE
SAVED HEREAFTER.

II. THE next thing in the doctrinal part, is to assign reasons for this point, that all those and only those that are made meet for the heavenly inheritance in this world, shall eternally partake of it in the world to come. In handling this I shall endeavour not only to evince the truth of it, but to convince conscience of its necessity, and persuade compliance with it.

1. It is fit persons be made meet, because no man by nature is meet for heaven. Men are estranged from God, "even from the womb," Psal. lviii. 3; and are those fit to live with God till brought nigh? Man is shapen and conceived in sin, Psal. li. 5; and is he fit to dwell with a holy God till sanctified? Man is dead "in trespasses and sins," Eph. ii. 1; and is such a dead block meet to converse with the living God? Man "is darkness," Eph. v. 8; and "what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" 2 Cor. vi. 14. Man by nature is a "child of wrath," Eph. ii. 3; and how can dried stubble dwell with consuming fire? Alas, we are all enemies to God in our minds, Col. i. 21. yea, "enmity itself," Rom. viii. 7; and "can two walk together except they be agreed?" Amos iii. 3. Can the sin-avenging God and the guilty sinner hold intimate correspondence till they be reconciled? O no, it will never be. Heaven and hell will as soon unite as God and an unregenerate sinner. Will the holy God take such vipers into his bosom? Can you imagine

God will deface or lay aside his immaculate holiness, to take you from the swine-stye into his holy sanctuary? What cleanly person could endure to have a filthy hog with him in his parlour or bedchamber? "Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee?" Psal. xciv. 20. No, no, "God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity," with pleasure and delight, Hab. i. 13. If God should take men from the dunghill into his palace, others would conclude that God is reconciled to sin, that it is a harmless thing, and not that abominable thing which his soul hates. No, it can never be; graceless sinners, so remaining cannot dwell with God, Psal. v. 4. 5.

2. Because this is the divine ordination and appointment, that there should be a connexion between grace and glory, holiness and happiness, Psal. lxxxiv. 11. As sin and hell are joined by divine commination, so grace and heaven are knit together by divine promise. So Rom. ii. 7, 10, "To them who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, God will render eternal life." This is a connexion of grace, not of merit; of promise, not of debt; yet inviolable, for God's justice and truth are engaged in it. It is fit the infinite God should distribute his mercies to whom, and upon what terms he pleaseth; now he hath said peremptorily, "without holiness no man shall see the Lord," Heb. xii. 14. All things are ordered and wrought after the counsel of his will, Eph. i. 11. First, he chose them "before the foundation of the world, that they should be holy," Eph. i. 4. They are redeemed to be holy, Tit. ii. 14; called with a holy calling, 2 Tim. i. 9; and therefore they are holy brethren that are partakers of this heavenly calling, Heb. iii. 1. Let wicked scoffers mock on to their guilt and cost. Such there are in the world, and

such must they be if they think to inherit heaven. It is God's ordination; you must be saints in this world, or never crowned as saints in the other; though you might be canonized for saints by men when gone, consider, sinner, whose word shall stand? God's or thine? Thou hopest to go to heaven without saintship, or meetness for it: God saith it, yea, swears it, Heb. iii. 18, that thou shalt never enter into his rest. This is God's counsel, that men must be brought through sanctification to salvation, 2 Thess. ii. 13; and can you think to overturn his appointed will, or counteract his counsels? Must the earth be forsaken for thee? Must the immutable God falsify his word to save thee against his will, yea, against thy will? For thou wilt not come to him for life: God will not be merciful to any who wickedly continue transgressors. The eternal determination of heaven is recorded in that chain of salvation, Rom. viii. 30, and all the men on earth and devils in hell cannot break one link of it. Predestination, vocation, justification, salvation, or glorification. Go try to turn day into night, or winter into summer, or to stop the course of the sun, before thou thinkest of diverting the proceedings of grace in the salvation of souls; but it is vain to attempt either; for his counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure.

3. It is the design of God in all his ordinances to make souls meet for heaven. "It has pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." Ministers and ordinances were given for perfecting of the saints. This is the means of conversion, "the power of God to salvation;* the means of edification, of resolution of doubts, consolation and confirmation; so are the seals of the covenant given to this end, to

* 1 Cor. i. 21. Eph. iv. 11—13. Rom. i. 16.

bring souls onward to this glorious inheritance. Now, sirs, consider, shall you receive this grace of God in vain? Shall all the ordinances be lost upon you? You must give account of sabbaths, sermons, and sacraments, shall they be the savour of death unto death to you, or the savour of life unto life? Alas, how do poor ministers toil and travel, pray and watch, weep and sigh to the breaking of their loins, and spending of their spirits, to bring you to God and heaven, and you pretend kindness to us, but have no real kindness to your own souls; we dare not but warn you in the name of Christ, lest you fail of the grace of God, and fall short of this inheritance; "We watch for your souls as those that must give an account: O let us do it with joy and not with grief," Heb. xiii. 17. If it be uncomfortable to us, it will be unprofitable to you. Must our sweat and labour be in vain? But it will not be in vain to us, for our work is with the Lord, we shall not lose our reward. God will pay the nurse, though the child die. Our crown will be given us, if we be faithful, though we be not successful, for that is in God's hands; but woe be to those souls that have sat under powerful ordinances, and that miss of this inheritance! O woe, woe to you, you cannot lose heaven, but be plunged into a deeper hell. Oh, ease our hearts, and save your own souls: kill us, and destroy yourselves; murder yourselves, and you again crucify Christ, whose person we represent. Rather give us leave to espouse you to one husband, ἡρμοσάμην, I have fitted you, says the apostle, as things that are pieced together, glued or sodered, (let us do so with you,) "that we may present you as chaste virgins to Christ," 2 Cor. xi. 2. Would to God this were the fruit of our labours!

4. This is the design of all God's providential dis-

pensations : mercies, afflictions, smiles, and frowns come upon this errand to make souls meet for heaven. Cords of love draw, rods of wrath drive the poor sinner from hell to heaven. The sunshine of love comes to melt and thaw our frozen hearts that God may set a stamp upon us. The loving-kindness of God leads to repentance ; Rom. ii. 4. O what an influence will God's unlimited goodness have upon an ingenuous spirit. As the sun attracts vapours from the earth, so this Sun of righteousness should and will, if our sturdy hearts hinder not, raise our hearts heaven-wards. It is pity we should stop here at the streams, and not be led up to the fountain. May this long-suffering of the Lord be your salvation ; 2 Pet. iii. 15. May love constrain you to love God ; may these loadstones so attract you, and these grapes of Canaan enamour you, that you may never rest till you appear before God in Zion. And what are all God's rods and redoubled strokes for, but to awaken you out of security, beat your fingers off from the world, weaken your corruptions, and cleanse and furbish your souls, as vessels for the high shelf of glory ? " For our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," 2 Cor. iv. 17. How is that ? Surely by working the soul into a fitness for that glory. This furnace melts away the dross of our hearts. Sea-tossings clear the water of grace ; the dark night fits for a pleasant morning ; these pangs prepare us for deliverance ; these blustering storms make us produce the peaceable fruits of righteousness, being sanctified by the Spirit, and improved by faith. Affliction is God's physic, which produces sickness, but afterwards is the means of health ; and shall we frustrate God's design in this also ? What, are you content with a heaven here,

and a hell hereafter? Nay, can you be content with a hell in both worlds? Must these be preludes to everlasting burnings? God forbid. Look at the Lord's end in these sufferings, and let it be yours.

5. The time of this life is the only time men have given them to be made meet for heaven. This life is an introduction to an eternal state. It is a seminary for another world. Gal. vi. 7, 8, "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap: he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting." Sowing seed is preparatory to reaping; yet men must expect only to reap that kind of grain which is sown; none can think to reap wheat who sowed oats; and you know there is more abundance in the reaping than in the sowing. So in this case, hell torments will be more exquisite and permanent, than the profit and pleasure of the sinner in sinning. Heaven's joys will infinitely surmount the Christian's labours and sorrows in this world; and there is great equity in both cases, for the object sinned against is infinite, and satisfaction can never be made by a finite creature; also the grace, from whence flows eternal life, is infinite, and will have an endless duration. But the point I am upon is to demonstrate the necessity of making meet for heaven in this world, or it will never be done: now or never. When the door is shut, the gulf fixed, and the soul loosed from the body, and has launched out into the vast ocean of eternity, there is no returning back to get the oil of grace, nor equipping the soul for another world. Eccles. ix. 10, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest." Time lasts not, but floats away apace; but what is everlasting depends upon it. In this world we

we either win or lose eternal felicity.* The great weight of eternity hangs on the small and brittle thread of life. "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation;" 2 Cor. vi. 2. This is our working day, our market time; surely it becomes us to lay that foundation well, which bears such a superstructure; to cast that anchor safely which is entrusted with a vessel so richly laden. O sirs, sleep now, and awake in hell, whence there is no redemption. Suppose by misdemeanour you had forfeited your estate and life, and upon much intercession, the king should cause an hour-glass to be turned, and set you a work to do, or lesson to learn; if you performed it you are pardoned and promoted, if not, tortured and executed: O how diligent would you be! What pains would you take? The case is your own, sirs; heaven and hell are before you; according to your improvement or non-improvement of this hour of life, so must you fare; dream not of a purgatory; "as the tree falls, so it lies. You enter by death into an unchangeable state, only the body at the resurrection will be joined to the soul to be partner with it in weal or woe, bliss or bane for ever. The state here is [*tempus operis*] the time of working; hereafter [*mercedis*] of reward. O look, before you leap into another world.

6. The Christian must be made meet here for the inheritance above, because he hath abundance of work to do, and privileges to gain, in order to the full possession of this blessed inheritance above. We have many graces to exercise, duties to perform, corruptions to subdue, temptations to resist, burdens to bear, mercies to improve, that will never be managed aright without a mind qualified for managing them. And observe it, the same disposition is requisite for

* Hic aut accipimus, aut amittimus vitam æternam.

making a Christian meet for any duty, that is requisite to make him meet for glory; the same habitual principle, and drawing it forth into lively exercise. Not only must the man of God be perfect, "thoroughly furnished unto all good works," 2 Tim. iii. 17; but every Christian, that is "a vessel unto honour, must be sanctified and so meet for his master's use, and prepared unto every good work," 2 Tim. ii. 21. Alas, an un-sanctified heart is unfit for spiritual service. Solomon saith, "The legs of the lame are not equal," he halts and goes limping, "so is a parable in the mouth of fools," Prov. xxvi. 7. How awkwardly and bunglingly doth he go to work in sacred things; just as an unskilful person handles a lute, a viol, or instrument of music; or as the men of Ephraim could not frame to pronounce Shibboleth aright, Judg. xii. 6. There must be a suitableness betwixt the agent and acts: no carnal heart can do any one good work well; materially he may do what is good, but not formally as good; in a good manner, for a good end; acceptably to God, or profitably to himself; "For they that are in the flesh cannot please God; and without faith it is impossible to please him." And can we think God will carry them to heaven that never struck a right stroke, or never did one hour's work for him, that he would accept? A graceless sinner is like the fruitless vine-tree, that is not meet for any work, but is cast into the fire for fuel; just so that branch which is professionally in Christ, which beareth not fruit, "is taken away, and cast into the fire and burned." * The divine wisdom is seen in suiting means to the end, object to the faculty, back to the burden; now graceless sinners are not fit for God's work, and if they be not fit in this world, they will never be fit.

* Rom. viii. 8. Heb. xi. 6, Ezek. xv. 3—5. John xv. 2—6.

2. The Christian hath many privileges to enjoy which he must be meet for even in this world, as reconciliation, justification, adoption, joy in the Holy Ghost, peace of conscience, communion with God, audience of prayers, &c. All these God hath promised, and Christ hath purchased for his children; they are children's bread, and must not be given to dogs. God will not throw away his mercies on such as value them not, but scorn them; they set light by precious delicacies of his table. The whole slight the physician; the full soul loaths the honey-comb; the carnal heart will not thank God for pardon and grace; and can we think God will force his blessings on such ungrateful miscreants, that scorn both him and his kindness? No, surely there are some that long for these blessings, and will thankfully accept them.* Yea, he will make you prize them, and part with all for them, or you shall never have them. What think you, doth not the great God take care to secure his own glory, as well as man's felicity? And would it not be dishonourable to God to bestow his richest treasures and blessings of grace on such as despise them, and take more pleasure in rooting in the sordid dunghill of sensual delights, than in seeking first the kingdom of God, which consists in "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." Alas, "honour is not seemly for a fool." These silly fools are not meet to sit as princes with the king at his table, because they want a wedding garment of suitable disposition for so high a privilege.†

* Matt. xxii. 5. ix. 12. Acts xiii. 46, 48. xxviii. 28.

† Rom. xiv. 17. Prov. xxvi. 1. Matt. xxii. 12.

CHAP. VIII.

ANOTHER REASON DRAWN FROM THE NECESSARY CONSISTENCY OF A CHRISTIAN'S MEETNESS FOR SO GLORIOUS AN INHERITANCE.

7. THE last reason why souls must be made meet for heaven is, because otherwise there would be no consistency or suitable adaptation of men to that holy place. If their natures be not changed, they will not have a suitableness of disposition to the glorious state above. The truth of this I shall demonstrate in these four particulars:—

(1.) None but persons made meet for heaven will have any mind to leave the world, and go to God. Carnal, unconverted souls are totally unwilling to go hence; they fancy to themselves an eternity below; “Their inward thought is, that their houses shall endure for ever,” Psal. xlix. 11, yea, themselves; for they put far from them the evil day, and sing a requiem to themselves, as the fool in the gospel; and no wonder, for they live by sense, and know what they have here, but know not what they must have hereafter: like the old doting monk, that shewed his fine accommodations, saying, “These things make us unwilling to die.” It was a usual saying among the heathens, “that Christians only are contemnners of death.” * This is applicable to sincere Christians; stoical apathy will not do it, but faith will. Julius Palmer, the martyr, said, “To them that have their souls linked to the flesh, like a rogue’s foot to a pair of stocks, it is indeed hard to die; but for him who is able to separate soul and body by the help of God’s Spirit, it is no

* *Soli Christiani sunt mortis contemptores.*

more hardship for such a one to die, than for me to to drink this cup of beer ;” nay, when the Christian is upon good terms with God, he desires to be loosed or dissolved, “and to be with Christ,” Phil. i. 23. Yea, it is the disposition of a soul meet for heaven, that he loves and longs for Christ’s appearing, 2 Tim. iv. 8; but the sincere Christian who is not actually meet for heaven, though through grace he be habitually meet, often shrinks at the approach of death, and is glad to chide himself out, and say as a holy man did, “Go out, my soul, go out, what art thou afraid of?”* And surely a man is more acceptable to God, and comfortable in death, who hath set all things straight, and hath nothing to do, but surrender his soul into God’s hands ; this man will make his Lord welcome any hour of the day, or watch of the night ; but the other is like a maid undrest and unready, though for the main she love her friend, and desire his coming, yet in the present juncture and under those circumstances, she is surprized and troubled that he should find her in such a state of dishabille. This is the case of the unmeet Christian.

2. None but souls meet for heaven are fit for death, through which all must pass. It is true, the apostle doth discover to us this mystery, which among the rest he might learn in the third heavens,† “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed ;” but this change is a peculiar dispensation at the end of the world, and may be regarded as equivalent to death. This is certain, the fruit of the curse, the sting of death will fasten its fangs on the unconverted soul, which is under the covenant of works, and not in Christ. It is only the sincere Christian that can sing that ἐπιβικιον

* Egredere, mea anima, egredere.

† 1 Cor. xv. 51.

the song of triumph; or can make that brave challenge, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" Only our Captain Jesus hath disarmed death, and it is only for his members; others are left to its rage, "death feeds on them;" it hath a full morsel of them. The first death kills the body, and the second death destroys the soul; but "blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection, on such the second death hath no power."* O happy state of real saints! Christ, our David, hath conquered this Goliath: the ark of the covenant hath driven back this swelling Jordan: this serpent may hiss and lit, not hurt;† strike down it may, not strike home; it may thrust God's children into the grave, not into hell: nay, our Lord sets his followers, who are thus meet for heaven, not only above danger by death, but fears of death, Heb. ii. 15; who can say as that gracious gentlewoman, a martyr, Written by me Ann Askew, that neither wisheth for death, nor feareth his might, and as cheerful as one that is bound for heaven. But oh the woful state of a graceless sinner! who is in nature's state, and loves and lives in sin, lies and dies in the old Adam. The saddest word in all the Bible is that pronounced twice in a breath by our blessed Lord, John viii. 21, 24, "Ye shall die in your sins," that is, under the guilt of your sins and sentence of condemnation. This appears awful from what he adds in the first place, "whither I go you cannot come," that is, to heaven, where sinners cannot enter. You will say then, no man can enter into heaven, for all are sinners, even to the last breath. When men are regenerated, is it *in articulo mortis*,

* 1 Cor. xv. 55—57. Psal. xlix. 14. Rev. xx. 6.

† Tollitur mors, non ne sit, sed ne obsit.

in the passage of the soul out of the body? May not all be changed alike then? * I answer, It is true all are sinning to the last gasp when breathing out their souls; but,

(1.) You must distinguish between a state of sin, and having sin. The best have relics of original depravity as long as they live: the death of the body only will annihilate the body of death: death is not properly the punishment, but period of sin; it reigns not in God's children at present, it shall not remain in them when dead. The guilt of sin is already gone, "for there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus," Rom. viii. 1; and the pollution, the very being of sin is taken away, as soon as death strikes the stroke.

(2.) I see not but the mighty God can perfectly expel sin out of the soul, and also perfect defective graces, at the moment of the soul's separation from the body, as well as he did infuse a principle of grace into the soul, in an instant, at the soul's first conversion; for by death "the spirits of just men are made perfect," Heb. xii. 23. Mind it, it is just men, not wicked; God will not infuse grace into men ordinarily in their passage out of the world; as men live, so they die; † and if men imagine God will put another principle into their hearts just as they pass out of this world, as this is a daring presumption, so they will be mistaken; for how is a departing soul capable of such exercises or reflections as are necessary in the work of conversion? Alas, the eyes, being set, the lips quivering, memory failing, and the body in a cold sweat, is unfit for any thing; their hopes giving up the ghost as their breath de-

* In answer to this question, see three opinions in Dr. Tuckney, *Theses et Præl. Theol. ubi videas præclare disputata*, p. 269, —292.

† *Qualis vita, finis ita.*

parts : and it is a wonder that the souls of wicked men go quietly out of their bodies ; it is strange they depart not as the devils out of the demoniacs rending, raging, tearing, foaming ; but if conscience be asleep, death will awake it. Could you follow their departing souls a minute out of their bodies, you would hear the howlings of despair.

3. Heaven will not receive any souls but such as are made meet for it on earth. Rev. xxi. 27, "There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination—for without are dogs," Rev. xxii. 15. They say Ireland will not brook a toad, a snake, or venomous creature to live and like in it : I am sure heaven will not admit, but cast out an unsanctified heart. The legions of apostate angels knew this, who abode not one moment in that holy place after they left their innocency. It is said of the halcyon's nest, that it will hold nothing but its own bird ; the same may be said of heaven : the serpent could wind himself into the earthly paradise, but none of the serpentine brood shall once peep into this heavenly paradise. For,

(1.) The text saith, "It is an inheritance ;" now an inheritance is for none but children ; it is true all God's children are heirs, Rom. viii. 17, and none shall inherit heaven except children : by nature we are children of wrath ; by grace and adoption children of God. All God's children are begotten again, "to a lively hope for this incorruptible inheritance," 1 Pet. i. 3, 4.

(2.) It is "the inheritance of saints," that is, of holy, sanctified souls. Persons must not think that heaven is like Mahomet's paradise, where there is delicious fare, pleasant gardens, fair women, and all sensual delights, fit lettuce for an epicure's lips. No, no, heaven is a state of perfect, immediate, and perpetual enjoy-

ment of God, suited to the matured faculties of a sanctified soul.

(3.) It is "the inheritance of saints in light." It is a bright and lightsome state, suited to illuminated souls; blind sinners can see no beauty there; such as are not changed from darkness to light are not fit for that state: see Acts xxvi. 18. Alas, a blind man can take no pleasure in beautiful objects, though the sun shine ever so gloriously. Heaven and light are synonymous; but light and darkness are directly contrary. "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth," 1 John i. 6; and such dark sinners are far from a suitableness to this state and place of light. O therefore, poor sinners, consider this, the holy God hates all the workers of iniquity; the holy heaven is no sanctuary for rebels and traitors; God will not take such vipers into his bosom; thou must either be renewed, or never received into glory; it is an undefiled inheritance, 1 Pet. i. 4, a polluted sinner must not enter; this would be incompatible with all God's attributes,—as his justice, then God would give to the wicked according to the work of the righteous;—it would blemish his holiness, as though the unclean were his delight equally with the clean;—it would contradict his truth, as though God regarded not what he had said that no unclean thing shall enter there. Every attribute would have reproach cast upon it, if God should save the unsanctified soul. Nay, it would counteract the undertaking of Christ, who came to save his people from their sins, not in their sins: it would oppose the office and operations of the Holy Ghost, whose office it is to sanctify sinners, and prepare souls for heaven. That sinner must surely be in a desperate case that must undeify the infinite Jehovah, God blessed for ever, or else he cannot be saved.

4. The unsanctified sinner would not be in his element in heaven. Heaven would be a hell to him, except his nature were changed and renewed. Most men mistake the nature of heaven; they only look upon it as a place of happiness; it is so, but withal it is a state of perfect holiness. There are holy privileges, and the enjoyment of God, but what care wicked men for his company? They say unto God, depart from us; and their choice shall be their punishment. There are holy joys and delights; but how will they like that who were never pleased except with senseless laughter, which is madness? Above there is the holy company of saints, but they cannot abide to be near them on earth; how then can they like to be associated with them in heaven? There is holy employment above, but alas, they are not at all qualified for, nor can they be delighted with the work of loving, praising, or glorifying God. Augustine hath a saying, "That the new song and the old man agree not well together :^{*}—no man could learn that new song, but the hundred, forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth," Rev. xiv. 3. Alas, they have not hearts nor harps tuned for it: suppose it were possible that our Lord should bring an unsanctified person to heaven, saith one, he could find no more felicity there, than an animal, should you bring him into a beautiful room, to the society of learned men, or a well furnished table; the poor thing would much rather be grazing with his fellow brutes: thus a poor graceless sinner would rather be with his cups or mistresses, at best in his markets, and counting his gold, but there are no such things in heaven; therefore if he were there, he would be quite out of his element, as a fish in the air, or a bird in the water, or fire. Can you charm an ox with music? or can you bring him to your melody, or make him keep time with your

^{*} Canticum novum et vetus homo male concordant.

skilful choir? So the anthems of heaven, saith one, are not adapted to a carnal man's mouth, suit not his ear. Sinners now think sermons long, sabbaths long, prayers and praises long, and cry, what a weariness is it; when will it be over? And are these, think you, fit for this heavenly employment to all eternity? where this noble company of celestial inhabitants, "serve God day and night in the temple," Rev. vii. 15. Alas, the poor unregenerate sinner hath no faculties suited to such a glorious state and exercise, as are above; the mind, will, memory and conscience, are like a full stomach that loaths the honey-comb; these old bottles cannot hold the new wine of glory. You may as well hew the marble without tools, or draw a picture without colours, or build without instruments or materials, as a soul not qualified with grace perform the work of God acceptably either on earth or in heaven. O sirs, think of this, you must be prepared, fitted, qualified for heaven here, or else heaven will be no heaven to you.

CHAP. IX.

THE SUBJECT APPLIED FOR CONVICTION AND LAMENTATION OVER SOULS THAT ARE UNMEET FOR HEAVEN.

I NOW proceed to application, and all the use I shall make of this point shall be for lamentation and exhortation.

1. To produce conviction, humiliation, and lamentation. If men would think on such plain demonstrations as are oft laid before sinners in the ministry of the

word, they would at last reflect upon themselves, and say, am I thus or thus prepared? upon what terms stand I for another world? am I an adopted child of God? am I justified? am I converted to God, and brought through the passage of regeneration? have I made a covenant with God, and taken God for my God, and given myself to him? what saving change hath taken place upon my heart? If I should come to you one by one, and propose to you such solemn questions as these, Friends, whither bound? whither are you going? are you for heaven or hell? Oh no, you will say, God forbid, that we should not go to heaven! God is a merciful God; Christ died to save sinners; we do not doubt but through the merits of Christ, we shall be saved as well as others. Alas, sirs, these are too general grounds, to build your hopes of salvation upon. God is merciful, but he is also just; Christ died for sinners, but do you imagine all shall be saved by him? Let me ask you a few sober questions, and answer them not according to your fancies, but according to scripture rule: Do you believe that all men shall be saved? what is hell then for, which is so oft mentioned in the Bible? or do you think that the gates of heaven are as wide as the gates of hell, or that as many shall be saved as lost? dare you so directly contradict our blessed Saviour, and give him the lie? Matt. vii. 13, 14. Can you imagine that our Lord Jesus, who is the porter of heaven, will admit any but those whom he saith he will entertain? or do you think he will admit those whom he saith he will keep out? what think you, can any secretly steal in, unknown to him, or forcibly thrust in against his will? Is the infinite all-seeing God grown so weak or ignorant that you can deceive or conquer him? or can you bribe him to let you in with fair words

or large gifts? or dare you stand to plead in his face that you are qualified and meet for heaven, when he tells you, that you are not? Do you think there is such a thing as a groundless presumption, or flattering hope that will give up the ghost? Is not the devil a deceiver? are not your hearts treacherous? and are not they fools that trust these, and will not try by the word what they affirm? And have you solemnly and faithfully tried your title to heaven? have you not taken all for granted without a serious proving of your state, merely because you would have it so? are you content to do so in temporal things? and will you madly venture your immortal souls on such grounds as you dare not try? or can you think to escape the strict scrutiny of the omniscient God? Sirs, the business is important; heaven and hell depend upon it. Ministers who believe that there is an eternity, and certainly know upon what terms souls are saved, dare not but be faithful to you, and declare the whole counsel of God.

I must first tell you, Who those are that are far off salvation, and are utterly unmeet for this inheritance, and can pretend no claim to it. Secondly, Such as pretend a claim, which is groundless, and but a pretended claim which cannot be made out on Scripture grounds.

1. There are persons within the pale of the visible church, (for I here meddle not with heathens or Jews) who are evidently excluded. These are sinners that carry a black brand on their foreheads, of whom a man may say without breach of charity, these exhibit visibly the doleful tokens of eternal death and perdition. Of these we have one catalogue, 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, "Know ye not," that is, methinks you cannot plead ignorance in so notorious a case so oft inculcated, that,

(1.) "The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God;" that is, who grind the poor, and overreach their brethren, when they have them at advantage, "God is the avenger of such," 1 Thess. iv. 6; therefore will not reward them with heaven.

(2.) Nor shall fornicators inherit the kingdom of God. Such filthy goats must be set at God's left hand. This sin (as venial a sin as it is reckoned by some) is ruinous, and excludes men from heaven. Do you think that such polluted dogs shall ever trample on the golden pavement, when God would not suffer even the price of a harlot or dog to come into his house? Deut. xxiii. 18.

(3.) Nor idolaters, gross, or more refined: for God will not permit his children to keep company, or familiarly converse with such on earth; and therefore they shall not be associated with them in the other world, for God is not well pleased with such.

(4.) Nor shall adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, inherit the kingdom of God; such vile wretches shall rather have fire from heaven, than be admitted into that holy place. These horrible acts of lewdness are not fit to be named among saints; and surely those who commit them cannot be received among saints.*

(5.) Nor thieves. Not only open robbers on the high way, or breakers of houses, but gamesters that cheat others, or purloining, wasteful servants, deceitful tradesmen, or wilful bankrupts, who basely get others' estates into their hands, and never intend to pay their just debts. These men, without restitution, shall have their ill-gotten silver and gold to torment them like burning metal in their bowels, James v. 2, 3.

* 1 Cor. v. 11. x. 5, 7. Eph. v. 3, 4. Rom. i. 24.

(6.) Nor covetous. These are fitly ranked with thieves, that run out with inordinate affection after the world, and share in her favours with great delight; that enlarge their desires as hell. These shall be shut out of heaven, for they have their portion in the present life, and are real idolaters.* These must be banished heaven.

(7.) Nor drunkards. Not only such as brutify themselves, and drink away their reason, but such as sitting long, continue till wine inflame them: yea, though they be not intoxicated, yet those purchase a woe to themselves, who are "mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink," Isaiah v. 11, 22.

(8.) Nor revilers. These are properly connected with drunkards; for the godly are usually the drunkards' song, that scoff and jeer at serious religion, and break their scurrilous jests upon the holiest saints: but there is no railing among angels or saints in heaven, Jude 9; nor shall such revilers come there: and one would think they do not desire to come to associate with those they so abuse.

(9.) I may add backbiters, who love to take up and blaze abroad a false report against their neighbours. These are excluded from God's tabernacle, Psal. xv. 1, 3; they forge all the calumnies they can against such as do them no hurt, wounding them secretly with a stab in the dark, or behind their backs; God will shut the door of heaven against such.

(10.) Swearers, that profane the glorious and tremendous name of the eternal God by horrible oaths, curses, and execrations: blasphemers of old were to be put to death, and if men now spare them, the flying roll of curses shall go out against them, and cut them

* Psal. xvii. 14. Col. iii. 5. Eph. v. 5.

off, Zech. v. 2—4. “Those that swear fall into condemnation,” James v. 12.

(11.) Liars, that invent or utter falsehoods on any account whatsoever. These carry their own doom in their consciences, and they may read the doleful sentence, Rev. xxi. 27, “There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, or maketh a lie.” The God of truth hateth liars, and will banish them from his court, as David did.

(12.) Apostates, that once made a fair shew, but are renegadoes to the truth, way, people, and worship of God. They bring a great reproach on religion; and our blessed Saviour pronounceth such as put their “hand to the plough and look back, to be unfit for the kingdom of God; God’s soul will have no pleasure in them.” O the dreadful end of those that turn their backs on Christ.*

Hearken, sinners, if any of you be of this number, read and tremble, there is no room for you in this glorious city above, you must be shut out. Living and dying in this state there is no more mercy for you than for the devils: heaven is shut against you, hell is open for you; how can you escape the damnation of hell? Matt. xxiii. 33. Alas, you are daily filling up the measure of your sins; the ephah is well nigh full, another sin, another neglect, and the next news you may hear, the talent of lead may be cast upon the mouth of the ephah, and thy soul carried into thine own place, Zech. v. 7, 8. One oath more, one lie more, one fit of drunkenness more, and thy iniquity is full, thy soul is gone. Who can tell but God may say to thee as to the rich man, Luke xii. 20, “This night thy soul shall be required of thee?” or as the word ἀπαιτοῦσιν signifies, they, that is, the devils shall require thy soul. Oh

* Psal. ci. 7. Luke. ix. 62. Heb. x. 38. 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.

how eagerly are infernal fiends watching for a commission to arrest thee with death on a journey, or to strangle thee in thy bed, and hurry thee headlong into hell with them! Thy iniquity is filling up; the sunshine of prosperity ripens it apace; the sweet rain of gospel ordinances brings weeds to perfection as well as corn. As God's children are making meet for heaven, thou art making meet for hell. Rom. ix. 22, "What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction:" *κατηρτισμένα*, made up, made ready, like sticks dried and bundled up to be cast into the fire. It is not said that God fits them for destruction, as it is said, verse 23, of the vessels of mercy which he had afore prepared unto glory. No, no, there needs no more to a sinner's fitness for hell, but leaving him to himself; he will fall apace downwards to perdition with his own weight. Ah sinner, thou little knowest how soon thy foot may slide off this slippery battlement on which thou standest, to the precipice of eternal destruction; little dost thou know how soon that flaming sword which hangs over thy head by the slender thread of thy natural life, may descend upon thee and separate soul and body, and follow this stroke of vengeance into the other world. Methinks thou wouldst not eat, nor drink, nor sleep quietly in this so dangerous, ruinous a state; every sin thou committest is a "treasuring up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath," Rom. ii. 5. Look to it, the Judge standeth before the door, death is ready to lay its cold hand of arrest upon thee; there is but a step between [you and death; that door which lets you out of time ushers you into eternal torments; and are you taking long strides to hell? shall you not be there soon enough? can you not sink yourselves

low enough? must you needs add drunkenness to thirst? impenitence to your sin? Alas, you love to wander, you hate to be reformed; yea, you hate instruction, and cast God's words behind you, Psal. l. 17. Ministers from the Lord follow you with tears, intreaties, arguments to persuade, and means to direct, and willingness to assist you, in the best manner they can, in your preparations for a future state, but you are reluctant to converse with them; you conceal your state from them; they employ their time in studying to do you good; they spend their lungs in speaking to God for you, but all doth no good, they cannot be heard till it be too late; no warning will serve. Men say as that evil servant, "My Lord delayeth his coming, so begin to eat and drink with the drunken;" let them know, "the lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in a hour that he is not aware of; and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth," Matt.xxiv. 48—51.

CHAP. X.

ANSWER TO AN OBJECTION OF VAIN PRETENDERS TO A MEETNESS FOR HEAVEN.

SOME may however say, you speak terrible things against the profane, but I bless God I am none of that class, my case is better than those you have described, I conduct myself fairly in my conversation, none can challenge me for gross enormities, I go to church, hear sermons, pray as well as God gives me grace, none are

perfect, I hope God for Christ's sake will pardon my defects; I repent of my sins from the bottom of my heart, and believe in Christ, and do as well as I can; God help us, we are all sinners; God will not be so severe as you say; I hope I shall go to heaven as well as others.

My answer is, It is not as I say, or you say, but as God himself saith; do I say any thing but what the holy God saith in the Bible? Object against it and disprove it; but must not the word of God judge you another day? Hath he not told us in his infallible word who shall be saved, and who shall not? and will you believe God or your own self-deluding hearts? Besides, I stand upon habitual meetness chiefly. What art thou, man, in point of state? Art thou a child of God or a child of the devil? Tell not me that thou hast done this or that good work, but art thou savingly converted from sin to God? Hast thou that renovation which necessarily accompanies salvation? This I have considered.

But that which I shall briefly hint at, is to tell you that many go as far as Kadesh-barnea, who reach not Canaan: many go far, that die in the wilderness; they set out fair, and hold on long, but yet never obtain this heavenly inheritance. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate," saith our Lord, "for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able," Luke xiii. 24.

1. You say, you conduct yourself fairly and live civilly. Alas, civil or external righteousness, and abstaining from gross sins will not do. Abimelech, a heathen, was an exact moralist; Paul, unconverted, was blameless. These were not saints nor meet for heaven.

2. You say, you go to church, attend on ordinances,

and hear the best preachers, so did those that heard Christ himself; yet at last were rejected, with "I know you not;" and so many others have done.*

3. You say, you pray and perform many religious duties; so did the Jews of old, who were very wicked, and rejected; so did the Pharisees: some have the form but want the power of godliness. These are lifeless blocks.†

4. You say, you profess the orthodox faith, and are not guilty of heresy; so did those mentioned, Rom. ii. 23, 28: creeds make not Christians. A sound head and unsound heart may be companions. The Scribe answered discreetly and orthodoxly, Mark xii. 34, and was not far from the kingdom of God, but never came into it.

5. You say, you have honest purposes and endeavours; even some attainments in growing better and mending what is amiss; it is well; but Saul said, 1 Sam. xxvi. 21, "I will no more do thee harm;" yea, Herod reformed and did many things, Mark vi. 20. All this is good, but not good enough for heaven.

6. You say, but my reformation was begun and attended with strong convictions and troubles of conscience; yet this will be no good evidence, for Cain had terrors; Felix had his tremblings; yea, "the devils believe and tremble."‡

7. But I repent of my sins, you will say, and mourn sore. I reply, hast thou considered well whether it be a worldly sorrow that worketh death, or a godly sorrow that worketh repentance to salvation? Saul wept sore, Ahab humbled himself, Esau sought the blessing with tears, Judas repented himself, || yet all come short.

* Gen. xx. 6. Phil. iii. 6. Luke xiii. 26. Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32.

† Isa. lviii. 1, 2. Luke xviii. 11, 12. 2 Tim. iii. 5.

‡ Gen. iv. 14. Acts xxiv. 25. James ii. 19.

|| 2 Cor. vii. 10. 1 Kings xxi. 27. Heb. xii. 17. Matt. xxvii. 3.

8. You say, but I associate with God's people, am well accounted of, can have testimonials under the hands of eminent ministers and Christians. I answer, so high did the foolish virgins attain, they had lamps, and waited, and went out to meet the bridegroom, yet the door was barred upon them, Matt. xxv. 1—12. Some have a name to live, "but are dead," Rev. iii. 1.

9. But God hath given me important gifts of memory, knowledge, and utterance in discoursing and praying, which surely he will not reject. I answer, so those introduced, Matt. vii. 21—23, had gifts of preaching, and working miracles, yet even to them the Judge will say, "I never knew you." Gifts and grace are different things; see 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

10. But I have grace, I have the grace of faith, love, and good desires. I answer, Simon Magus also believed, and was baptized, yet had neither part nor lot in this matter, for his heart was not right in the sight of God, Acts viii. 13, 21. There is a feigned as well as unfeigned faith, a dissembled love, unsound desire, and legal repentance.

11. But I have been exercised in extraordinary acts of piety, in zeal for religion, in reformation, and sufferings for God; I doubt not but this inheritance belongs to me. I answer, all this thou mayest do, and be no candidate for heaven: Jehu was a great reformer, yet a false-hearted hypocrite; young Joash was zealous for a season. What strict observers of the Sabbath were the Scribes and Pharisees? *

12. You will say further, O but I have assurance that my state is good, and not only so, but experience some joy and peace of conscience, which are as so many foretastes and prelibations of my future happiness. I answer, It is well, but see to it that they be of the right

* 2 Kings x. 16, 28. 2 Chron. xxiv. 4, 18. Luke xi. 42. xiii. 14, 15.

stamp: the stony-ground hearers anon with joy receive the word, Matt. xiii. 20. Balaam had extraordinary raptures in hearing the words of God, seeing the vision of the Almighty, and beholding the glory of God's people Israel, when he fell into a trance, Numb. xxiv. 4—6, 17; and there are that “taste of the word of God, and powers of the world to come,” Heb. vi. 5, 6, yet such may fall away irrecoverably. Oh how many catch at the promises, and are pleased with a sweet discourse on free grace! Alas, these long for, and love gospel-delicacies, as children delight in sweet meats; and as Dr. Ames saith, “Arminian grace may be but the effect of a good dinner.” Nature works with something like the appearance of grace when affected by that which suits the fancy, but sound conviction and deep humiliation have never in them prepared the soul for a judicious relish of divine things, nor produced such blessed consequences in heart and life, as in God's children.

Oh how many poor sinners are flattering themselves in a golden dream, and fear no danger, till they be past hopes of recovery! Many think they are travelling towards heaven, and never question it, till as they are stepping out of this world, as they think, into heaven, they miss their footing, and drop down into hell; they never see their error till it be too late to retrieve it. Oh that men were awakened in time! If you stay till death have executed his commission, it will be too late. The day of judgment must needs find him unready, whom the day of death finds unready.* Roman Catholics have a conceit, that the interval between death and judgment may do great things to make them meet for heaven, but they are mistaken. Death

* *Imparatum inveniet dies judicii, quem imparatum invenerit dies mortis.*

launcheth you into the boundless ocean of eternity; "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after that the judgment," Heb. ix. 27. Ah, sirs, what think you? Is there a heaven or hell after this life, or is there not? and are you uncertain whether by death, you shall enter upon eternal happiness or misery, and yet can you be quiet? If you were not wavering in your belief of future things, you would be restless as long as you are doubtful. You owe your calmness and repose to nothing but your lethargy; if you were not infidels you would be distracted. What, man! liable the next moment to be wailing in hell, and not repent on earth? he is worse than a devil that trembles not under divine wrath. What, if it have not seized on you, as on devils, flames are at the door, wrath hangs over your heads; the only reason you see it not, is because you are blind. The Lord open your eyes and then I shall not need to preach terror to you, your hearts will meditate terror; fearfulness will surprise you, and make you say, "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire, with everlasting burnings?" Isa. xxxiii. 14. It is a wonder you do not run up and down like men deranged; surely you have taken some opiate to cast you into a dead sleep, or intoxicate your spirits, as some malefactors do, that dare not die sober: even some wiser heathens took great draughts of wine, saying, "That no voluptuous person can go in his wits into an invisible state." But is this a making meet for heaven or hell? Can rational persons think to escape a pitfall by shutting their eyes? It is reported of Robert, Duke of Normandy, William the Conqueror's father, that when going on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and falling sick, he was carried in a litter on the shoulders of Saracens, he said, "He was borne to heaven on the devil's back?" and will you adopt his

language? Alas, will you trust the fiend of hell to bring you to heaven? is he grown so full of charity to souls? Oh forlorn case of miserable sinners! have you no better friend than Satan? that you can be content to be rocked asleep in his cradle, and carried with ease to hell, rather than pass to heaven in our Lord's chariot paved with love? is security your best fence against misery? Can the poor fig-leaves of temporary righteousness secure you from divine vengeance? can you be content to depend on that another day, which you dare not put to the trial here?

Alas, I am afraid, 1. Some are very ignorant and know not what is necessary to a meetness for heaven. Most think if they have but time to say at death, *Lord, have mercy upon me; God forgive me my sins; Lord Jesus, receive my soul;* they think they have made their peace with God, especially if they can say, they forgive all the world, and die in charity with all, and send for the minister to pray with them, and receive absolution and the sacrament, when perhaps they are little fit for such a solemn ordinance; then the minister commends their souls into God's hands, praises them at their funeral, and now they are certainly gone to heaven; these poor mistaken sinners blessed their souls whilst living, and men must commend them, and account them blessed when dead, Psalm xlix. 18.

2. Most are inconsiderate; they regard nothing but mere objects of sense, like the kine of Bashan, "which went out at their breaches, every one at that which was before her," Amos iv. 1—3. They never mind things out of their natural sight; they "put far away the evil day," little thinking what will be the end of their careless ways; either they say to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant; or else in

atheistical scorn and mockery, "Let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die;"* let us be merry while we may; we shall never be younger; when we are gone all the world is gone with us; as if there were no reckoning day, or retribution in the other world; but let such study Eccl. xi. 9, 10. Rom. viii. 13. Luke xii. 19, 20. Psal. ix. 17. 2 Thess. i. 6—9. John iii. 18. Psal. l. 22. Oh sirs, disappointments are dreadful. It is sad, with a witness, to be confident of heaven, and yet doomed to hell; as Hamilear dreamed he should the next night sup in Syracuse, which indeed he did, not as a conqueror, as he hoped, but as a prisoner. O how will it double your final misery, to live in confident hopes of reigning with Christ, yet to be judged by him, and banished from him for ever! If you say, "soul, take thine ease," and God say, "devil, take his soul;" whether of these think you, will prevail?

CHAP. XI.

EXHORTATION TO ALL TO OBTAIN MEETNESS FOR HEAVEN.

NEXT, exhortation may be addressed first, to sinners: secondly, to saints, to attain a meetness for the heavenly inheritance: the former by habitual, the latter by actual meetness for this glorious state.

1. I shall need to say the less to move the former class: having urged practical reasons from our natural unmeetness, divine ordination, the design of ordinances and providences, the season of life for it, the work and

* Amos vi. 3. Jer. v. 31. Isa. lvi. 12. 1 Cor. xv. 32.

privileges here requiring it, and the inconsistency of a frame entirely unadapted to that glorious inheritance: most of these are directed to the state of unsanctified, careless souls, therefore I shall say the less on that branch. O that I had here the tongue or pen of an angel! or the bowels of blessed Paul to persuade sinners to look after a meetness for heaven. Consider,

(1.) What else have you to do in the world? Your very children will tell you that man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever. If you come short of these attainments you live in the world to no purpose, you are unprofitable cumber-grounds.

(2.) You frustrate Christ's undertaking in the world, and do what you can to render his merits useless; you tread under foot the Son of God, count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and disregard, if not do despite to the Spirit of grace, Heb. x. 29; you say plainly I like not the purchase, I will have none of it; you call heaven Cabul, a dirty thing, as Hiram called Solomon's twenty cities he gave him; and can you think it much to be dealt without heaven, when you thus "judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life?" Acts xiii. 46.

(3.) Every day brings you nearer heaven or hell. It is reported of the pious Lady Falkland, that going to bed at night, she usually said, "Now I am nearer heaven by one day than ever I was." One day added to your age is a day taken away from your life. O think when you have heard a sermon, or spent a sabbath, I am now nearer heaven or hell; the word hath been to me "the savour of life unto life, or of death unto death," 2 Cor. ii. 16. It carries me forward some way; if I bring forth meet and suitable fruit, I shall receive a blessing from God; if briars and thorns, I am rejected, "nigh to a curse, whose end is to be

burned," Heb. vi. 7, 8. The word either hardens or softens. Woe to me, if all that God doth aggravates my condemnation.

(4.) Eternity brings up the rear of time. If it were but making fit for a day's pageantry, there would be no such great need of diligence to get matters ready; though it is said, Jer. ii. 32, "Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire;" though it is for the short exhibition of a marriage day? Oh but this is for eternity. An eminent painter of antiquity being asked why he bestowed so much labour on his picture, answered, "I paint for eternity." Indeed there is nothing of value but what relates to eternity. Eternity gives weight and emphasis to all created beings. The apostle thought all visible sublunary things not worth a cast of his eye in comparison with this eternity.* Alas, sirs, is eternity nothing with you? O my friends, this, if any thing, is worth attention, to be for ever with the Lord, to enjoy God thousands and ten thousands of millions of years, or to be banished from his presence, and tormented with devils and lost souls for ever. Oh this word *for ever* is overwhelming. A pious man in company sat in a deep study; and being demanded what he was thinking of? Answered, only with repeating "for ever, for ever, for ever," constantly for some time: this is indeed a solemn consideration. O that you would seriously lay to heart the great things of another world! On the one hand, the enjoyment of God and Christ, the company of saints and angels, the perfection of your natures, a crown of glory, fulness of joy and pleasures at God's right hand for evermore, through the perpetual ages of a boundless eternity; all this were worth praying, obeying, and suffering for a thousand years! On the other

* 2 Cor. iv. 18. See a book called "Glimpse of Eternity."

hand, think of the sting of conscience, the company of devils and damned spirits, the loss of God, Christ, heaven, and your precious souls, the burning lake, the bottomless pit, the scorching flames, and this for ever and ever—an endless duration! O sirs, if you would but look down into that stupendous gulf, what a change would it work in your hearts! You would banish your vain company, lay aside your worldly business, abandon your sensual pleasures, and mind nothing else till your souls be safe for eternity. This would be as the cry at midnight, “Behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye forth to meet him, Matt. xxv. 6. As sleepy as they were, this startled them; so it would you, as if you heard a voice out of the clouds saying; sinner, thou art now summoned to appear before the dread tribunal of the all-seeing Judge, to receive thy final sentence, and to be sent to an everlasting state of weal or woe; stay not one moment in thy state of unregeneracy; haste, haste, make all haste out of it; fall to the work of faith and repentance as for thy life; defer not one day; now or never.

You will say, can I make myself meet for heaven? What can I do? The work is God’s. I answer, God is the efficient, but he will make you instruments in this work. God’s grace and man’s duty are very consistent. Study Phil. ii. 12, 13. Up and be doing, and God will be with you. Though God must turn, yet you should endeavour to turn yourselves, Ezek. xviii. 30, 31. Though God make you a new heart, yet he will have you make yourselves a new heart. O sirs, without delay commence the work, examine, prove, try your state by the rule of the word; attend the most piercing, powerful ministry; search out all your iniquities, and confess them before the Lord with grief, hatred, and shame; beg converting grace as for your

lives ; plead with God for pardon through the blood of Christ ; solemnly renew your baptismal covenant in taking God for your God, and giving up yourselves to him, and then read, meditate, watch and pray, mortify your beloved lusts, obey the commands of God, and do these things speedily, seriously, and constantly, and see what the effect will be. If you will fall to it, well and good, if not, you are guilty of self-destruction ; and remember you are this day warned.

2. I turn myself to truly gracious souls that are in a safe state for the main, as to habitual meetness, but I fear are far short of that actual meetness which is requisite, as to a lively exercise of suitable graces ; a clear evidence of being in a spiritual state ; despatching work off their hands, being mortified to time, and longing for heaven. Alas, the wise virgins slumbered and slept. I fear few of us are in that state of readiness in which we ought to be, or might have been, or to which others have attained ; nay, it is well if now our souls be in that frame in which sometimes we have been. What decays of love, zeal, and tenderness of conscience ? what backslidings, deadness, hardness, worldliness, and formality do God's children fall into ? What staggerings in our faith of the reality of unseen things ? How uncertain about our title to an inheritance above ? Doth not our slavish fear of death shew this ? Our instability and variable course in religion ; our distractions in holy duties ; our frequent closing with temptations, and too oft stepping aside into sin ; our intermitting duties of God's worship, and estrangement growing between God and our souls ; our unreadiness in our accounts ; our unwillingness to go to God : all these too sadly demonstrate our unmeetness for heaven. Alas, friends, are we not yet meet ? Let us be ashamed of our slackness ; what

have we been doing all this time, with these helps and privileges we have had? Have not many young people and others that set out after us out-stript us, and are got to heaven? Are we not ashamed of our loitering and lagging behind? What has become of the many warnings we have had in different ways? Have we any greater matters to mind? Do we not bring dishonour to God and discredit to our religion, by our backwardness? And can we have that comfort and confidence in meeting the bridegroom of our souls as is fit? Alas, our Lord will be less welcome if he surprise us unawares, as I have told you. Ah, sirs, you little know how near death is, and therefore should be always ready to meet our Lord. It is matter of great lamentation that so few of God's children are meet for their home; and like wayward children are loth to go to bed, though God hath taken a course to weary us out of the world. The Lord help us to lament and lay to heart our great unmeetness for heaven. When sin, security, or insensibility steals in upon thy spirit, search it out, mourn for it, confess it, beg pardon for it, and recover thyself quickly out of it; rest not satisfied with any distance from God; recover thy wonted familiarity with thy best friend, and mend thy pace towards heaven, as a man in his journey that hath been hindered, hies the faster, to recover what he has lost by his stay; breathe after more likeness to God and fitness for every dispensation, and long to be with God in heaven. Alas, sirs, you little know how near you are to eternity. You see the sands that are run to the lower end of the glass, but the upper part, as one saith, is covered with a mantle, you know not how few sands are yet to run. God forbid that you should have your evidences to procure when you should have them to produce. If you be not sure of heaven, you

are sure of nothing, all worldly things must leave you, or you must leave them. Despatch all but this off your hands, and be as the bird on the wing to her nest, or the traveller, whose mind is still on home, nothing will please him but home. Say with Calvin, *usquequo Domine?* "How long, Lord, shall my soul be at a distance from thee? Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

CHAP. XII.

MEETNESS FOR HEAVEN IS A BLESSING WHICH
MERITS GRATITUDE TO GOD.

I PROCEED briefly to explain the second thing contained in the text; which is,

That it is a transcendent mercy worth thanking God for, to be made meet for the heavenly inheritance.

If we must thank God for daily bread, for houses, health, estates, worldly comforts and accommodations for our bodies, how much more should we thank God for heaven, and a meetness for heaven? without which we shall never come there.

The truth of this I shall demonstrate in these seven particulars:

1. Spiritual mercies are of most worth, and deserve from us most thanks to God. But this is a spiritual mercy, Eph. i. 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ;" it is ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις and so may signify spiritual things as well as places, that is, graces, privileges, comforts,

or whatever hath a tendency to the good of the soul, or eternal salvation in heaven : these indeed are a Benjamin's portion, a goodly heritage, the quintessence and marrow of all blessings. If God should give you the whole world, and put you off therewith, you are accursed and wretched ; if he give you grace and glory, you are happy, if you had nothing else. Our Lord thought that a plenary benediction, with which he begins his first sermon, Matt. v. 3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God." There is the mercy promised, and the qualification for it, both choice blessings.

2. That which is the purchase of Christ is worth our grateful acknowledgements ; but this is the fruit of Christ's purchase ; it is not only a purchased inheritance, nor did Christ only purchase us to be heirs of this inheritance, but he hath purchased a meetness in believers for that inheritance ; Tit. ii. 14, "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." How thankfully do men celebrate Christ's nativity ! But that mercy of Christ's being born into the world, though transcendently great, will never advantage you, unless "Christ be in you, the hope of glory," Col. i. 27 ; his dwelling in your hearts by faith, Eph. iii. 17, entitles you to the inheritance he hath purchased. Look within thee, man, as well without thee, and above thee, for the fruits of Christ's purchase, and occasions of thankfulness to God.

3. The operations and fruits of the Spirit are surely worth thanking God for ; but this is one of the most glorious fruits of the Spirit, to fit souls for heaven. Our Lord promiseth to send the Holy Ghost to supply the want of his bodily presence, and it is the richest gift that ever proceeded from Father and Son ; such

as have it, "out of their belly flow rivers of living water," John. vii. 38, 39. God is to be admired in all the saving works and actings of the Spirit, the convincing, humbling, sanctifying, supporting, satisfying, sealing, comforting, quickening, enlarging, confirming, witnessing, and reviving operations of it. Alas, we had never looked after God, had not the Holy Spirit knocked at our doors; we had been blind in the things of God, but that the Spirit enlightened us; dead but that the Spirit enlivened us; we had wandered for ever, but that the Holy Spirit restored us; our hearts had been for ever hardened from God's fear, had not God's Spirit softened us; we should have been unlike God, but that the Holy Spirit stamped God's image upon us; whatever hath been done upon our hearts to prepare us for heaven, the Holy Ghost hath been the agent; yea, that Spirit that we have quenched, grieved, resisted, and vexed; what cause then have we to be very thankful? This is the golden oil, that runs through the golden pipes of ordinances into the candlestick of the church, Zech. iv. 11, 12.

4. The gospel dispensation is great matter and ground of thankfulness; "It is a mystery which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men," Eph. iii. 4, 5. But what is the marrow and main design of this gospel revelation? why, ver. 6, "That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel. O glorious design! O blessed charter! But what are we better unless we be partakers of this privilege? therefore the apostle saith, "Christians are fellow citizens with the saints." This is the gospel way of enfranchising and incorporating poor strangers into the immunities of heaven, and surely this is worth thanking God for. The charters of some cities cost

them dear, and the chief captain said to Paul, "with a great sum obtained I this freedom;" Paul said, and so may believers say in this sense, "but I was free born," Acts xxii. 28. Though it cost Christ dear, yet it costs us nothing, but reception. This new Jerusalem is built all of free stone, and shall not our shoutings echo, grace, grace to the head stone, Jesus Christ? Zech. iv. 7: especially since our freedom rescues us from infernal tortures, as Paul's did him from scourging; and makes us heirs of heaven.

5. Peculiar advantages not afforded to all, create grounds of thankfulness. Our Lord said, Matt. xi. 25, 26, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." Alas, what have any of us, but what we have received? Discriminating kindnesses call for the most lively gratitude. What did God see in any of us, that might procure heaven for us? or within us what preparation for heaven? You and I are of the same polluted mass of mankind as others; most unlikely to become heirs of such a glorious inheritance as heaven is. What could God see in us to attract his heart to us? Nay, what did he not see in us to produce aversion against us? It was "the kindness and love of God our Saviour; not by works of righteousness which we had done, but according to his mercy he saved us," Tit. iii. 4, 5. Alas, what loveliness could God see or foresee in us to make us children, then heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ? We may say with honest Judas, John xiv. 22, "How is it that thou wilt manifest thyself to us, and not unto the world?" It must be answered, "Even so Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." When thousands are left, why art thou taken? How came it to pass that when philosophers and eminent

sages of the world were so bewildered in the dark about felicity, that God should shew you the right way to true happiness, and lead you into it, and in it? Surely all is of free grace.

6. Fittedness for any duty or dispensation is a mercy worth thanking God for. Such is the christian frame that makes meet for heaven; such a person is prepared to do God's will, or suffer God's will; he is formed for a prosperous and adverse condition; his foot standeth in an even place; like a watch in a man's pocket, turn it this way or that way, it keeps its motion; so the Christian in all conditions preserves his movements heaven-wards. "The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger," Job xvii. 9. He is ready for any thing to which God calls him. Like the man of God mentioned, 2 Tim. iii. 17, "who is perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." O what a blessed thing it is to be in a disposition to embrace a suggestion to pray, read, confer, meditate, or receive the Lord's supper upon an invitation from men, or summons from God! The church in Cant. v. 2, found the want of this, when she saith, "I sleep, but my heart waketh;" that is, I have the principle, but want the exercise of grace; and, alas, how unready was she to entertain her beloved, though she had given him a call; and the sad consequences of this unfit frame are obvious, both as to her sin and suffering: but oh, what a mercy it is to have a heart ready pressed for God's service! Give God the glory of it, and it is worth something to be in a readiness for mercy, affliction, death, or judgment, as those are that are meet for heaven. The speech of Basil was noble, when Modestus, the præfect, threatened confiscation, torments, and banishment; he answered, "He need not

fear confiscation that hath nothing to lose; nor banishment, to whom heaven only is a country; nor torments, when his body would be crushed with one blow; nor death, which is the only way to set him at liberty." Polycarp was ready for beasts, or any kind of death, because he was ready for heaven: for as the Christian is delivered from danger by death, so from the fear of death, Heb. ii. 15. Death itself is the day-break of eternal brightness to the child of God; and is not this worth thanking God for?

7. God's promise of heaven surely merits gratitude. Could we get a glimpse of that state and place of glory, and the inheritance of saints in light, together with our title to it; O how would it dazzle and transport us! It is said that the temple of Diana was so bright, that the door keeper still cried to such as entered, "Take care of your eyes." Much more may we say so of the surprising glory of the heaven of heavens; and therefore our Lord saith, "None can see his face and live." But death blows dust out of the eyes of glorified saints, and the morning of the resurrection doth so fortify the sight, that it can behold this inaccessible light with admiration; even as all the stars face the sun. "Fear not little flock," saith our Saviour, Luke xii. 32, "for it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Is not a kingdom worth thanks, and such a kingdom; and to have this freely of gift, not to wade to it through wars and blood, and all this by hereditary right, which is the clearest title? O sirs, do you know what heaven is? It is the immediate enjoyment of God, an immunity from all evils, a possession of all good, the perfection of our natures, the maturity of our graces, the destruction of all sin, the banishment of Satan and his temptations, fulness of joy, and total death of all grief. Indeed it is

such a state as can neither be expressed nor conceived. How vile and contemptible would all things below appear to one that with Paul, is rapt up into this paradise! I have read of one Adrianus a heathen, who was present when some martyrs were examined and tormented, he asked, "What was the reason they suffered such tortures," it was answered in the words of that passage, 1 Cor. ii. 9, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him:" the very rehearsal of which words converted this Adrianus, and he became a martyr also. O what a transcendent reward is there in those mansions above! and God doth not grudge us the knowledge of those glorious things. He is not like some rich men that will not let their heirs know, what they will do for them, till they die; no, the apostle saith, ver. 10, "that God revealeth them to us by his Spirit;" and ver. 12, "that we may know the things freely given to us of God." We may know them perceptively, not comprehensively; by faith, though not by sense. We know but yet in part, but then we shall know as we are known; not as God knoweth us, for our knowledge and God's must not be so compared, but as holy spirits know us both now and for ever, we shall both know and be known by immediate intuition; yet in this world God gives his children, though variously, some glimpses and dark representations, as through a glass, by metaphors or parables, and this discovery is to raise up our hearts in thankfulness, and longing desires to be above with God.

CHAP. XIII.

PRACTICAL INFERENCES FROM THIS DOCTRINE.

FOUR things may be-inferred :—

1. That there is undoubtedly such a future state of blessedness for God's children after this life : "There remaineth a rest to the people of God," Heb. iv. 9. I need not go about to prove this, it is sufficiently and abundantly confirmed by abler hands ; not only from scripture, but nature, reason, divine providence in the world, and the grace of God in the hearts of his people. Enough is said to silence infidelity in our hearts, and to stop the mouths of all deists on earth. Can any rationally imagine that God would endow man with such a noble soul, and furnish that soul with such noble faculties of mind, will, conscience, and affections, capable of knowing, loving, and enjoying God, with fears and hopes of a future state, and all this in vain ? Can we think the holy, just, good, wise, and righteous God will always make the wicked prosper and afflict believers, and not right these things in the next world ? Hath Christ come into the world to no purpose ? What would become of his birth, life, doctrine, death, resurrection, ascension, intercession, and appearance at the day of judgment, if there were no life of future retribution ? What would become of the precepts, promises, threatenings, motives, means and helps to a holy life here, and to attain eternal life hereafter, if there were no such thing ? Can we imagine that the great God governs the world by a falsehood ? Are heaven and hell bugbears, or mere imaginations of brain-sick fools ? Is there not a reality in Satan's temptations, to draw

there no devils or spirits, and so by consequence no God? Away with these wild conceits, contrary to the sentiments of all mankind.

2. Then it follows that assurance is attainable; not only objective assurance, that there is a glorious inheritance, and that God will give it to some; but subjective also, that this is mine, that it is for me. I have a title to it; else how could persons thank God for making them meet for this inheritance? This assurance ariseth from acting of faith, and produceth "rejoicing in hope of the glory of God," Rom. v. 2. The gospel is a gospel of peace, not of fears and doubts. Assurance may be had, not only by divine revelation, but in the use of ordinary means. "I know in whom I have believed," 2 Tim. i. 12; read on, and you will find not only his assurance of his present happy state, but his perseverance and future felicity; and it was not his peculiar privilege, but is common to other believers, 2 Cor. v. 1. It is true, God is a free agent, and may bestow it on whom, and when he pleaseth. Some have it most clearly at first conversion: as Bernard for a time after his conversion, remained as it were, deprived of his senses, by the superabundant consolations he had from God. Cyprian saith, "He thought before his conversion, it was impossible to find such raptures and transports as now he found in a christian course." Many a close walking Christian can set his seal to this truth; only it ordinarily comes in after hard conflicts with temptation, wrestlings with God, much experience, and regular walking with God; there is salvation and there are the joys of God's salvation, Psal. li. 12, "These," saith Mr. Latimer, "are the sweet-meats of the feast of a good conscience." There are many other grateful portions at the feast, but this is the banquet; this is better felt than ex-

or drive us from God and future happiness? or are pressed, and must be endeavoured after, and prayed for; "Ask," saith our Lord, "and ye shall receive that your joy may be full," John xvi. 24.

3. That the exercise of thankfulness is a Christian's important duty. This, this is the proper character and employment of a Christian: God commands it, privileges call for it, gracious souls have been much engaged in it; it is comprehensive of man's whole duty. Ursin entitles the practical part of his catechism, *de Gratitudine*, on Gratitude. O that Christians were more in it! Praise is comely for the upright. This is the epitome of religion, the emblem of heaven, the proper air in which a Christian breathes; it is most acceptable to God, creditable to religion, and profitable to the Christian. Mr. Fox tells us, the state of Zurich engraved the year of their deliverance from popery upon pillars, in letters of gold, for a lasting memorial; and have not Christians cause to thank God for grace and glory? The heathens could say, "Call a man ungrateful, and you cannot call him worse." Hezekiah brought wrath on himself, Judah, and Jerusalem, for not rendering to the Lord according to benefits done to him, 2 Chron. xxxii. 25. O sirs, you little know what an evil ingratitude is; you fill your souls with guilt; you too much resemble wicked men whose character is unthankful, 2 Tim. iii. 2. This sin makes hard times, yea, it makes you like the worst of heathen, for which sin God gave them up to unbridled sensuality, Rom. i. 21, 24: you act disingenuously, as those that have served themselves of God, and then disown him. How can you apply to God in the next strait, when you are so much in arrears? will not your mouth be stopped, and conscience fly in your face? do you not daily depend on God for new

mercies? and is not thankfulness a natural duty? is not gratitude for spiritual mercies, a great evidence of your interest in them? and is not every mercy sweetened by thankfulness? nay, is not this a means to continue them? The more thankful any have been, the more eminent they have been; their graces have shone and glistered like pearls and diamonds. Yea, once more, the more thankful you are, and the more cause of thankfulness you will both have and see. Thankfulness for what you are sure you have, will produce a fuller evidence of that of which you are doubtful. The Lord humble us for our base ingratitude; which is, as one saith, a monster in nature, a solecism in manners, a paradox in divinity, and a parching wind to dry up the fountain of divine favours.

You will say, O sir, I could be thankful with all my heart, if I knew I were fit for heaven, and that my soul shall at death enter into peace; but alas, as long as I am doubtful and at uncertainties, how can I be thankful? Conscience would check and condemn me; and indeed I have more cause to be humbled and ashamed for my unmeetness, than thankful for any meetness I find in me for heaven.

Ans. (1.) There may be grounds both of humiliation and thankfulness in the same soul and subject. Let the best saints do the best they can, and attain to the highest pitch imaginable, they will have cause of humiliation for their defects.

(2.) Holy jealousy, fears, and solicitude, do well in God's children to keep them humble; and indeed, as grace increaseth, sight of imperfections increaseth, and sense of short coming: the more discoveries of God's holiness, the viler will the Christian be in his own eyes, as Job and Isaiah; and the humbler the soul is

the more acceptable with God.* Thank God for that humility.

(3.) You may and should be thankful for the mercies which you have, and which you cannot deny that God hath vouchsafed. You have your lives for a prey; you are out of hell, which is more than you deserve; you have abundant outward mercies, do not these deserve thankfulness? Christ hath also purchased grace and glory for sinners, nay, further, he hath put thousands into possession of this inheritance, and should not this make you thankful? Besides, heaven is offered to you, and you are under the means of grace, and have a possibility of obtaining this happiness, which is not the case with devils and lost souls; and is not this ground of thankfulness?

(4.) Be sure you keep in mind the distinction of habitual and actual meetness for heaven. If you have not the former, either relative or real, if you be not adopted or justified, and are neither converted, nor have entered into a covenant engagement with God, I say, the Lord have mercy on you, your case is doleful; you have great cause of lamentation. O man, "Be afflicted and mourn, let your laughter be turned into mourning, your joy to heaviness," James iv. 9; you, graceless "rich men, weep and howl, for your miseries that shall come upon you," James v. 1. I have not a word of comfort from the Lord to you. Your earthly inheritance shall be taken from you, and you shall be thrust into the dungeon of hell. You may for a while kindle a fire, and warm yourselves at the sparks you have kindled, but, saith God, "this shall you have of mine hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow," Isa. l. 11. Stand you by while the saints take comfort in their portion. Read Isa. lxx. 13—15.

* Job xlii. 5, 6. Isaiah vi. 5. lvii. 15. lxvi. 2.

It is to you, the heirs of promise, to whom I am now speaking, and bear you this in mind, that it is one thing to have a right to this inheritance, another to know you have a right. Many a gracious person is much in the dark about his relation, yet his state may be safe for the main. What sayest thou? hast thou not the things that accompany salvation? Heb. vi. 9. Hath not God been dealing with thy heart, as he useth to deal with such as he designs for heaven? Hast thou not seen thy woful state by nature? the necessity of Christ and grace? Hast thou not experienced a change from nature to grace, from death to life? Hath not this new birth cost thee griefs and groans, prayers and tears? Dost thou not delight now in what thou didst disdain? Is not thy principle, rule, and end, otherwise than formerly? Hast thou not changed thy company, course, and manner of life? Speak out, man, belie not thyself, deny not God's grace; something like grace thou seest in thyself, and to be sure Satan and the world oppose it, and man and thyself could not produce it: it is of God, a seed sown by the hand of omnipotency. "And he that hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ," Phil. i. 6.

As to actual meetness for heaven, I refer you to what hath been laid down before; look it over, deal impartially; see if your experience do not answer those particulars; hath not God helped you in the exercise of the graces of faith, hope, love, and humility? Hath not God given you some substantial evidence of sincerity, by diligence in duty, reflection on your state, appealing to God, and pleading with God for the Spirit's sealing? Hath not God helped you to be despatching your work off your hands, spiritual and temporal, relative and public? Are you not much more

mortified to corruption and worldly enjoyments, and have you not spiritualized earthly things, and got more intimate familiarity with God? What say you to these things? Do not your hearts echo back an affirmative, setting your seal to these things? I have not time nor room to enlarge further; but I would have you diligently compare yourselves now with what you were some years ago. Is not your repentance more evangelical? Doth not the sense of divine love extort from you more tears of godly sorrow, and more vehement hatred of all sin, purely as it is offensive to God? Hath not your faith been more vigorous in its actings on your dear Lord? in closing more fully with promises? Have you not been more frequent and serious in renewing your covenant with God? and have not such days and duties been solemn heart-melting opportunities? Have you not been more constant and enlarged in the duty of secret prayer, with shorter intermissions and more enjoyment? Do you not spend your time better than formerly? Are you not more concerned to fill up every vacancy with some useful business relative to earth or heaven? Have you not more incomes of grace and assistance in duties both as to matter and manner, to unite your hearts, and raise your affections to God, and sometimes suggest words to you? Do you not more concern yourselves for the souls of relations and others in prayer and discourse, being more weight-ed with the necessity of their conversion? Are you not more endeared to saints as saints, though poor, or rough in their manners, or of a different persuasion? Have you not got power over your passions, to regulate them? and if you feel unruly emotions, can you pray them down, and through grace calm them? Can you not put up with injuries and affronts, and not only so as not to revenge but forgive, and pray heartily for the

repentance and remission of such as are most malicious against you? Is it not more the grief of thy heart when God is dishonoured, his Spirit grieved, and his gospel reproached by the sins of the profane or of professors? If thou thinkest any are offended by thee, is it not more a real trouble to thee than formerly, and thou canst not rest till thou seekest reconciliation? And if thou art conscious of giving them just occasion, thou acknowledgest thy fault and makest concession to them? Hast thou not learned more faithfully and discreetly to manage the duty of privately admonishing an offending Christian, drawing out bowels of compassion for such as are fallen? Do not public concerns of the church or nation lie nearer thy heart daily? Canst thou not more rejoice in the gifts, graces, holiness, and usefulness of others, though they may obscure thine? Art thou not more glad when corruptions are mortified than gratified, when occasions of sinning are removed, rather than afforded, though it cost thee dear? Dost thou not more sensibly understand the sweet life of faith in temporal things, committing all to God, and finding provision has been strangely made? Are not thy affections more spiritualized towards dearest relations? Dost thou not love them in the Lord, and the Lord in them, so that thou canst freely part with them upon God's call? Art thou not more taken up with God's mercies, to give him the glory of them, than any personal satisfaction thou hast in them? Is not thy heart daily more weary of the world, and longing more for heaven? Yet after all this, canst thou not say, thou art nothing, and deservest nothing but hell? And if God glorify his justice in thy confusion, thy mouth is stopped, and thou must justify him for ever with flames about thine ears? Dost thou not account thyself the greatest of sinners,

and least of saints, judging that by the grace of God thou art what thou art? and this thou canst truly say, that God is more thy exceeding joy, and Christ more precious to thy soul than ever?

If thou canst in thy sober, deliberate, settled frame, answer these questions, thy state is safe and happy, and thou art meet for heaven; yet not so meet, but still breathing after more meetness, till the last breath of life; for no man on this side death was ever meet enough, and all must be ascribed to grace, grace in the foundation, and grace in the topstone.