

MAN'S IMPOTENCY TO HELP HIMSELF OUT OF HIS MISERY.

For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.—ROM. V. 6.

IN this chapter there are two parts: in the first, the apostle lays down the comfortable fruits and privileges of a justified estate; in the second, he argues the firmness of these comforts, because they are so rich that they are scarce credible, and hardly received. The firmness and soundness of these comforts the apostle representeth by a double comparison:—(1.) By comparing Christ with Christ; and (2.) Christ with Adam. Christ with Christ, or one benefit that we have by him with another, from the text to ver. 12; then Christ with Adam, the second Adam with the first, to the end of the chapter.

1. In comparing Christ with Christ, three considerations do occur:—

[1.] The efficacy of his love toward us before justification, with the efficacy of his love toward us after justification. The argument standeth thus: If Christ had a love to us when sinners, and his love prevailed with him to die for us, much more may we expect his love when made friends: if when we were in sin and misery, shiftless and helpless, Christ had the heart to die for us, and to take us with all our faults, will he cast us off after we are justified and accepted with God in him? This love of Christ is asserted in ver. 6, amplified in ver. 7 and 8, and the conclusion is inferred in ver. 9: 'Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.'

[2.] The second comparison is of the efficacy of the death of Christ, and the efficacy of the life of Christ. It is absurd to think that Christ rising from the dead, and living in heaven, should not be as powerful to save, and bring us to God, as Christ dying was to reconcile us to him.

[3.] The third comparison is the privative mercy, or being saved from hell, with the positive mercy, or obtaining a title to heaven: 'And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement,' ver. 11.

2. For the comparison between Christ and Adam, the sum of it is, that Christ is more able to save than Adam to destroy, and therefore

justified persons need to fear nothing. As Adam was a public person, and root of mankind, so is Christ a public person; for Adam was *τύπος τοῦ μέλλοντος*, 'the figure of him that was to come,' ver. 14. Adam was a public person, but a finite person, having no intrinsic value in himself, and only was all us by divine institution; but Christ, beside the institution of God, was an infinite person, and therefore there is a *πολλῷ μᾶλλον*, a 'much more,' upon Christ. His sacred virtue exceedeth that cursed influence of Adam in many particulars, amply set down in the latter end of the chapter by the apostle.

The words begin the first comparison. In them,—

1. The condition wherein we are by nature is set forth by two notions—*ungodly*, and *without strength*: the one noteth that we have no worth to move God to help us, for we were 'ungodly;' the other, that we have no power to help ourselves, for 'we were without strength:' we were 'without strength,' and so need help; 'ungodly,' and so refused help.

2. The means of our recovery, *Christ died for us*.

3. The seasonableness of our redemption, *in due time*.

For the first notion, whereby our natural estate is expressed, 'ungodly,' I shall pass it by; the next notion, 'without strength,' will yield us this point:—

Doct. That man, fallen, is destitute of all power and means of rising again, or helping himself out of that misery into which he hath plunged himself by sin.

This will appear, if you consider his condition with respect to the law, or with respect to the gospel, and those terms of grace which God offers in Christ. The former more properly falls under the consideration of this place; but, because of the method of this exercise, you expect the discussion of the latter also, I shall take occasion from hence to speak of that.

First, With respect to the law. That will be understood by a view of that scripture that expresseth the tenor of the law: 'Cursed is every one that continueth not in all the words of this law to do them,' Gal. iii. 10; where is considerable,—

1. The duty it exacts.

2. The penalty it inflicts.

3. The operation that both these have upon the fallen creature.

1. The duty it exacts. An innocent nature, that is presupposed; for the person must 'continue.' It doth not say, 'now begin;' the sentence of the law doth not suppose man as lapsed and fallen, or as having already broken with God; but as in a good and sound estate. And then universal, perpetual, perfect obedience is indispensably required: he must 'continue in all things' with all his heart, and that continually; if he fails in one point, he is gone. This is personally exacted of all men, as long as they abide under Adam's covenant: 'He that doeth them shall live in them;' and 'the soul that sinneth, it shall die,' Ezek. xviii. 4, xx. 11. Now if God should call us to an account for the most inoffensive day that ever we passed over, what would become of us? 'If thou shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?'¹ Ps. cxxx. 3. Better never born, than to be liable

¹ That is, *rectus in curiâ*—be able to make a bold defence.

to that judgment, when the law shall take the sinner 'by the throat,' and say, 'Pay me that thou owest,' Mat. xviii. 28. What shall the poor wretch do? So that here we are 'without strength,' altogether unable to come up to the obedience of the law of works. The law can make nothing perfect, because it is become 'weak through our flesh,' Rom. viii. 3. To fallen man it establisheth a course of punishing sin, not of taking away sin: we may increase the debt, but we cannot lessen it. If our obedience were exact for the future (let us suppose it), yet the paying of new debts doth not quit old scores. They that could not keep themselves when entire and innocent, cannot recover themselves when lost and fallen.

2. The penalty it inflicts: 'Cursed is every one.' How cursed? Cursed in all that he hath, Deut. xxviii. 15-18. All his enjoyments become a snare, and temporal comforts do but harden him, and prepare him for a greater misery. Cursed in all that he doeth: his prayer is turned into sin; his hearing, the 'savour of death unto death;' all his toil and labour in outward service is to no purpose: 'The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination: how much more when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?' Prov. xxi. 27. At the best it is but an 'abomination.' God will not accept an offering at his hands; much more when it is polluted with sinful and evil aims. But this is not all; he is cursed for evermore: the law bindeth him over, body and soul, to everlasting torments; and in time he shall hear that dreadful sentence, 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels,' Mat. xxv. 41. There is but the slender thread of a frail life that hinders the execution of this sentence upon him: a sinner stands upon the very brink of hell, and ever and anon is ready to be cast in; where he shall eternally lie under the wrath of God. So that here we are 'without strength,' because we cannot satisfy the justice of God for one sin, but are always satisfying, and can never be said to have satisfied; like a poor man that pays a debt of a thousand pounds by a farthing a week.

3. Consider how this works with him. An exaction of duty under so severe a penalty doth either terrify or stupefy the conscience; he that escapeth the one suffereth the other; or else, thirdly, doth irritate corruption; or, fourthly, obtrude us upon a sottish despair, so as to give over all endeavours and hope of salvation.

First, Sometimes it terrifieth. That is easily done; the conscience of a sinner is a sore place; they are 'all their lifetime subject to bondage,' Heb. ii. 15. There is a hidden fear in the heart of a wicked man, not always felt, but soon awakened, either by a sound conviction from the word, or some sore judgment, or by the agonies of death, or serious thoughts of the world to come. Felix trembled when Paul did but mention God's 'judgment,' Acts xxiv. 25; the prisoner makes the judge tremble. A sinner is afraid to think of his condition, if God do but a little break in upon his heart: do what he can, he lies under the bondage of a wounded spirit, and wherever he goes, like the devils, he carrieth his own hell about with him.

Secondly, If it terrifieth not the conscience, it stupefieth the conscience, that they grow senseless of their misery, 'past feeling,' Eph. iv. 19. And that is a dangerous crisis and estate of soul, when

once a man comes to that, and goeth like a fool to the correction of the stocks.

Thirdly, It irritateth their inbred corruption: 'The commandment came,' that is, in full conviction and power, and 'sin revived, and I died,' Rom. vii. 9. The more we understand of the necessity of our subjection to God, the more opposite is the soul to him; as a dam makes a river or strong stream the more violent, or as a bullock at the first yoking becometh the more unruly. Or,

Fourthly, It breedeth a sottish despair: 'There is no hope; therefore we will walk after our own devices, and do every one according to the evil imaginations of our own heart,' Jer. xviii. 12. It is to no purpose to speak to us, or strive further about us; as if they had said, 'There is no hope; and therefore we will live as we list, without any further care of turning to God. This is the worst kind of despair, when a man is given up to his 'own heart's lust,' Ps. lxxxix. 12, and runneth headlong in the way of destruction, without hope of returning. There is more hope of them that are under despairing fears or a terrified conscience than there is of those who are under despairing resolutions or a stupid and sottish obstinacy. Thus as to the law, man is helpless.

Secondly, Consider man as to terms of grace offered in the gospel. He is still 'without strength;' not only in a damnable condition by the law, but, without grace, unable to accept the gospel. This will appear by two considerations:—

1. By those emphatical terms of scripture by which the case and cure of man are set forth.

2. By those positive assertions whereby all power is denied to man to convert himself to God, or to do anything that is spiritually good.

1. Those emphatical expressions which represent his case and his cure.

[1.] His case. The scripture sets forth man's condition thus: that he is born in sin, Ps. li. 5; and things natural are not easily altered. Greedy of sin: 'He drinketh in iniquity like water,' Job xv. 16; it noteth a vehement propension, as greedy to sin as a thirsty man to drink. Thirst is the most implacable appetite; hunger is far better borne. But this, you will say, is but now and then, in a great temptation or vehement passion. No: 'Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is' evil, 'only evil,' and that 'continually,' Gen. vi. 5. By how many aggravating and increasing circumstances is man's sin there set forth! There is in him a mint always at work: his mind coining evil thoughts, his heart evil desires, and carnal motions; and his memory is the closet and storehouse wherein they are kept. But may not a man be reclaimed? is not this his bondage and trouble? No; his heart is a heart of stone, Ezek. xxxvi. 26; that is, inflexible, insensible. When God useth the word, some common motions of his Spirit, some rousing providences, yet all is in vain; for man's 'heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked,' Jer. xvii. 9; inventing shifts and excuses to avoid God, and to cheat itself of its own happiness. But is not the New Testament more favourable than the Old? or is not man grown better, since there was so much grace discovered? I answer—No; there is a

perfect harmony between the Testaments; there you will find man represented as a 'child of wrath by nature,' Eph. ii. 3, even the elect as well as others to be a 'servant of sin,' Rom. vi. 17. Never such an imperious master, never such a willing servant: sin never leaveth commanding, and we love the work. You will find him again expressed as one averse from God, 'alienated from his life,' Eph. iv. 18. It is a melancholy thought to a carnal heart to think of the life of God. As an enemy to the law, Rom. viii. 7; one that neither can nor will please God. As 'blind,' and knoweth not what to do, 2 Peter i. 9: and this blindness spiritual is worse than bodily. A man that is blind in body seeketh for a fit guide; as Elymas, when he was stricken blind, 'sought about for one to lead him by the hand,' Acts xiii. 11. As weak and 'without strength,' here in the text; yea, stark 'dead in trespasses and sins,' Eph. ii. 1-5; yea, worse than dead: a dead man doeth no more hurt, his evil dieth with him; but there is a life of resistance and rebellion against God that goeth along with this death in sin. Now, put all this together, and you may spell out man's misery, what a wretched, impotent creature he is in his natural estate. The scripture does not speak this by glances or short touches; neither is it a hyperbole used once or twice, but everywhere, where it professedly speaks of this matter. Certainly man contributeth little to his own conversion: he cannot 'hunger and thirst' after Christ that 'drinks in iniquity like water;' there is nothing in nature to carry him to grace who is altogether sinful. If the scripture had only said that man had accustomed himself to sin, and was not 'born in sin;' that man was somewhat prone to iniquity, and not 'greedy' of it; and did often think evil, and not 'continually;' that man was somewhat obstinate, and not a 'stone,' an 'adamant;' if the scripture had only said that man was indifferent to God, and not a professed 'enemy;' if a captive of sin, and not a 'servant;' if only weak, and not 'dead;' if only a neuter, and not a 'rebel;'—then there might be something in man, and the work of conversion not so difficult. But the scripture saith the quite contrary.

[2.] The cure. Certainly to remedy so great an evil requires an almighty power, and the all-sufficiency of grace; therefore it is good to see how conversion is described in scripture. Sometimes by enlightening the mind: 'And the eyes of your understandings being enlightened,' &c., Eph. i. 18. Man, the wisest creature on this side heaven, is stark blind in the things of God. Though he hath the light of nature, and can put on the spectacles of art, and dress his notions of divine things by the glass of the word, yet ere the cure is wrought, something must be done upon the faculty: the eyes of our understandings must be enlightened, as well as the object revealed. Ay! but this infusion of light is not all; the scripture speaks of opening the heart: 'He opened the heart of Lydia,' Acts xvi. 14. God doth not only knock at the heart, but open it. He knocks many times by the outward means, but finds no entrance. Yea, as one that would open a door,—he tries key after key, till he hath tried all the keys in the bunch; so does God use means after means; but till he putteth his fingers upon the handles of the lock, Cant. v. 4, 5, the door is not opened to him. Well, then, the mind must be enlightened, and the heart opened. If

these words are not emphatical enough, you will find conversion expressed by regeneration: 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,' John iii. 3. Mark, we must not only be reformed, but regenerated. Now because generation is an ordinary work of nature, and often falls out in the course of second causes, therefore it is expressed by the metaphor of resurrection, Eph. ii. 5. But that which hath been may be again; therefore it is called a creation: 'We are' *ποίημα αὐτοῦ*, 'his workmanship,' Eph. ii. 10; 2 Cor. iv. 6, v. 17; Ps. li. 10. Yea, further it is expressed by victory, 1 John iv. 4; or the beating and binding of the 'strong man,' by one that is 'stronger than he,' Luke xi. 21, 22; by 'bringing into captivity every proud thought,' 2 Cor. x. 5. All these expressions doth the scripture use to set out the mystery of grace. One expression may not enough be heeded, and therefore are many types and figures of it used, that what is wanting in one notion may be supplied by another. As let us gather them up a little. There must be not only light in the mind, but the heart must be moved; and that not a little stirred, but changed, fashioned anew, born again. And because generation supposeth a previous disposition in the matter, not only is it called 'regeneration,' but the term 'resurrection' is used, in which the matter is wholly unprepared. But yet because still here is matter to work upon, therefore it is called creation, which was a making all things out of nothing. God works faith where there is no faith, and repentance where was no repentance; 'and calleth the things that are not as though they were.' But now because sin makes us worse than nothing, and as in creation, as there was nothing to help, so there was nothing to resist and hinder, therefore it is expressed by victory; implying the opposition of God's work, and the resistance that there is in the heart of man till it be overpowered by grace.

2. The next proof is from those assertions whereby all power is denied to man to convert himself to God, or to do anything that is spiritually good. As when it is said he cannot know, 1 Cor. ii. 14; he cannot believe, John vi. 44; he cannot obey, Rom. viii. 7. Nay, to instance in single acts: he cannot think a good thought of himself, 2 Cor. iii. 5; he cannot speak a good word: 'How can ye, being evil, speak good things?' Mat. xii. 34. He cannot do anything, John xv. 5. He doth not say, *nilhil magnum*, but *nilhil*; not 'no great thing,' but 'Without me ye can do *nothing*.' Well, then, when man can neither know, nor believe, nor obey, nor think, nor speak, nor do anything without grace, surely man is 'without strength,' wholly impotent and unable to turn himself to God.

Obj. 1. But here is an objection: If it be so, how can these things stand with the mercy of God, as the Creator of mankind, to require the debt of him that is not able to pay? with the justice of God, as the judge of the world, to punish him with eternal death for the neglect of that which he could not perform? or with the wisdom of the supreme lawgiver, to exhort him by promises who hath no power to do what he is exhorted unto?

Ans. 1. I answer to the first—God doth not lose his right, though man hath lost his power; their impotency doth not dissolve their obligation; a drunken servant is a servant, and it is against all reason

that the master should lose his right to command by the servant's default. A prodigal debtor, that hath nothing to pay, yet is liable to be sued for the debt without any injustice. God contracted with us in Adam; and that obedience which he requireth is not only due by covenant, but by law; not only by positive law and contract, but by immutable right. It is harsh, men think, to suffer for Adam's fault, to which they were not conscious and actually consenting; but every man will find an Adam in his own heart: the old man is there, wasting away the few remains of natural light and strength. And shall not God challenge the debt of obedience from a debtor that is both proud and prodigal? We are proud; for when we are miserable, we think ourselves happy; and when we are poor, we think ourselves rich; and when we are blind, we conceit ourselves very seeing; and when we are naked, we think ourselves well clad, Rev. iii. 17. And therefore God may admonish us of our duty, and demand his right; if for no other reason but to show us our impotency, and that we may not pretend that we were not called upon for what we owe. And as man is proud, so he is prodigal. We spend what is left, and throw away those relics of conscience and moral inclinations which escaped out of the ruins of the fall.

Ans. 2. As to the second, how God can with justice punish him for the neglect of what he could not do, I answer—Our natural impotency is voluntary. We must not consider man only as impotent to good, but as delighting in evil, and loving it with all his heart. As man cannot, so he will not, come to God, John v. 40. Our impotency lies in our obstinacy, and so man is left without excuse. We refuse the grace that is offered to us, and by continuing in sin, increase our bondage, our inveterate customs turning to another nature.

Ans. 3. As to the last, how God can exhort and persuade us, for answer, suppose we should say—This is only for the elect's sake, who certainly 'are the called according to purpose,' Rom. viii. 28; whereas others are called *obiter*, 'by the by,' and as they live intermingled with them. If the elect did dwell alone, and were a distinct community by themselves, the objection were plausible; but they are hidden amongst others, and therefore the reprobate have the like favour in the external means with them. The world standeth for the elect's sake, yet the sun doth not shine upon them alone, nor the showers fall upon their fields alone. Or let me illustrate it thus: The sun shineth, though blind men see it not; the rain falls upon the rocks and mountains, as well as the fruitful valleys: so are exhortations of duty promiscuously tendered to good and bad. This might be answer enough; but that which I rather say is, that these exhortations have their use; for they carry their own blessing with them, to them to whom God means them for good. The word has a ministerial subserviency to the power of God; as when Christ said, 'Lazarus, come forth,' it raised him out of his grave. As for others that are not converted by them, it is for their conviction, and to bridle their fierceness, and a means to civilise them, and keep them from growing worse, whereby many temporal blessings do accrue to them; as Pagan Rome flourished in all manner of virtue and success as long as moral precepts were in force. But of this more in the next objection.

Obj. 2. If man be so altogether without strength, why do ye press him to the use of means?

Ans. I answer—Though man cannot change himself, yet he is to use the means; and that for several reasons:—

1. That we may practically see our own weakness. Men think the work of grace is easy, till they put themselves upon a trial: the lameness of the arm is found in exercise: 'Apply thy heart to understanding,' then 'cry for knowledge,' Prov. ii. 2, 3. Whosoever sets himself in good earnest to get any grace, will be forced to cry for it before he hath done. We never seek strength at God's hands in so feeling a manner, till our experience convince us of our weakness. When a man goes to lift up a piece of timber heavy above his strength, he is forced to call in help.

2. The use of the means we owe to God, as well as the change of the heart. We lie under a moral obligation to use them. God, that hath required faith and conversion, hath required prayer, hearing, reading, meditating; and we are bound to obey, though we know not what good will come of it: as Abraham obeyed God, 'not knowing whither he went,' Heb. xi. 8; and Peter, when there was little hope, saith, 'Howbeit, at thy command,' &c., Luke v. 5. Our great rule is, we are to do what he commandeth, and let God do what he will.

3. To lessen our guilt. For when men do not use the means, they have no excuse: it is plain laziness and want of will, not want of power, when we will not so much as try to come out of our condition; we love our bondage, and shut the door upon ourselves; or, as that phrase, 'judge ourselves unworthy of eternal life,' Acts xiii. 46; pass sentence upon our own souls. It is a sign we care not whether God show us mercy, yea, or no; for you will not so much as bestow a thought upon it; you come under the censure of wicked and slothful servants, Mat. xxv. 26.

4. There is encouragement in the use of means many ways.

[1.] If we do not something, we shall grow worse. Standing pools are apt to putrefy. Man is of an active nature, either growing better or worse: when we do not improve nature, we deprave it: 'They corrupt themselves in what they know naturally,' Jude 10. Voluntary neglects draw on penal hardness; and so your impotency is increased. There is this benefit of using means—it prevents much sin and hardness of heart: it is like the embalming of a dead body; it keeps it from stinking, though it does not restore life.

[2.] Without the use of means they can never hope for anything: 'How shall they believe without a preacher?' Rom. x. 14. If ever I meet with God, with Christ, it must be in this way; it is good to lie at the pool, as the poor man did who was unable to get in when the angel stirred the waters, John v. 3-5. Marriage is instituted for the propagation of mankind, yet the soul is of God only. No man abstaineth from marriage because he cannot beget a reasonable soul. So grace is of God; but hearing, reading, praying, are the instituted means; and we must not abstain from these means because grace is not of ourselves, but God.

[3.] It may be God will meet with us. It is the ordinary practice of his free grace so to do; and it is good to make trial upon a com-

mon hope: 'Pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee,' Acts viii. 22. There is a great uncertainty, yet pray; it is God's usual way to meet with them that seek him: 'I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth,' Luke xi. 8: 'for his importunity's sake,' *διὰ τὴν ἀναίδειαν*, for his impudence.¹ God is not engaged; but who knows what importunity may do? He may, and he may not, give grace; but usually he doth. It is God's usual way to bless man's industry; and yet all they that labour have not an absolute certainty of success. Who would forbear ploughing, because in one year of ten there may happen a dearth or a lean harvest? Act; God may come in (for usually he doth) with his influence and blessing.

Let me now give you some reasons why God permits this weakness and want of strength to lie upon the fallen creature.

1. To exalt the freeness and power of his grace. First, The freeness of his grace; for God hath shut up all under the curse, that there may be no way of escape but by his mercy; their eternal ruin and damnation is else certain and inevitable: 'God hath concluded them all under unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all,' Rom. xi. 32. *Συνέκλεισε*, that is the word: the state of unbelief is there compared to a prison, made sure and fast with iron bars and bolts; and by God's permission man hath 'shut up' himself in such a prison that mercy alone might open the door to him. Jew and Gentile lie fast bound with a chain that can be loosened by no hand but God's. So, Gal. iii. 22: 'The scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe:' it is the same word and notion: we may mourn and sigh through the grates of the flaming prison, but can never get out till God look upon us in mercy through Christ. And so also the power of his grace in rescuing us out of this misery: it is a mighty power that works in them that believe, Eph. i. 19. When we consider it, we may wonder at it that ever such a change should be wrought in us that are so carnal, so obstinate: 'Who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light,' 1 Peter ii. 9. It is indeed marvellous that ever we should get out of the prison of sin; more miraculous than Peter's getting out of prison, having so many chains, and doors, and keepers upon him, Acts xii.

2. To humble the creature thoroughly by a sense of his own guilt, unworthiness, and nothingness. In our natural state we are 'ungodly' and 'without strength.' Why has God permitted it? 'That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God,' *ὑπόδικος τῷ Θεῷ*, Rom. iii. 19, liable to the process of his revenging justice; and so to humble us for our inability and obstinacy, that we may go complainingly to God, saying, 'Lord, I am as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke,' Jer. xxxi. 18. Whosoever hath passed this trial, doth sensibly find it.

Use of all.

1. To the unconverted.—to be sensible of their condition, and mourn over it to God. Acknowledge the debt; confess your impotency;

¹ And so fitly expressing our restlessness in the use of means.

beg pardon and grace ; and, in a humble sense of your misery, endeavour earnestly to come out of it. By such doctrines as these men are either 'cut at heart,' Acts vii. 54, or 'pricked at heart,' Acts ii. 37, which is the far more kindly work. Some men's hearts and lusts are exasperated ; and they rage and storm when they are warned of their danger by a closer application. Oh ! it is better to bemoan yourselves, than fret against the Lord, and yield to a sottish despair. There is some hope when conviction ends in groaning rather than murmuring ; and you do not fret against the Lord's sovereignty, but complain to him of the naughtiness of your hearts, begging his grace for Christ's sake. Therefore go and lie at his feet, and say, Lord, I have a blind mind, a froward heart ; none more. I shall never of myself fly the evil forbidden, perform the good commanded, renounce these bewitching lusts, take up such a course of service to thy blessed majesty. Oh ! take away this stony, untractable heart ! &c. You are in prison, but you are 'prisoners of hope,' if you do so.

2. To press the converted to thankfulness. We were once in such a pitiful case, till God plucked us as brands out of the burning ; we were utterly miserable and destitute of all good. Oh ! blessed be God, that opened the prison-door, and proclaimed deliverance by Christ to poor captives ; and not only proclaimed it, but wrought it for us : none but an Almighty arm could loosen the bolts, and shoot back the many locks that were upon us. Peter, when the angel made his chains fall off, 'considered' the matter, Acts xiii. 12, and went to give thanks among the saints. Oh ! when there were so many doors and bolts upon you, such difficulties and disadvantages in the way of your conversion, consider it, and bless God for your escape : 'Blessed be the Lord, that gave me counsel in my reins,' Ps. xvi. 7.

3. Let us compassionate others that are in this estate. Poor souls ! in what a sad condition are they ! We have not usually such a deep sense of their misery as we should have. Israel was to pity strangers, because they were once strangers in the land of Egypt : we ourselves have been in the house of bondage. Oh ! pity poor captive souls. Especially doth this concern the ministry ; they that do *induere personam Christi*, that 'stand in the stead of Christ,' should *induere viscera Christi*, 'put on the bowels of Christ :' 'God is my record how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Christ Jesus,' Phil. i. 8. When we were 'ungodly,' and 'without strength, Christ died for' sinners ; and wilt not thou labour for them, and employ thy talent to edification ? Oh ! if we had more weighty thoughts about the worth and danger of souls, we would not do the Lord's work so sleepily as usually we do ; but as 'co-workers with God,' we would beseech you with all earnestness 'not to receive the grace of God in vain,' 2 Cor. vi. 1. Every advantage should be taken hold of : as a sinking, perishing man, if it be but a bough in the waters, catcheth at it, so should we press you to improve all closer applications and ministerial helps, and that with compassion and tenderness, as having ourselves been acquainted with the heart of a poor, impotent, captive sinner.