

THIRTEEN
S E R M O N S
PREACHED
ON VARIOUS OCCASIONS.

[FIRST PUBLISHED 1756.]

He being dead, yet speaketh.—HEB. xi. 4.

BY
JOHN OWEN

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ADVERTISEMENT.

TO THE READER.

THE following discourses were preached by that truly venerable divine in the last century, Dr. John Owen : and in order to be fully satisfied they are genuine, Mrs. Cooke of Stoke-Newington, by this means, informs the reader, that her pious grandfather, Sir John Hartopp, Bart. wrote them in short-hand from the doctor's own mouth, and then took the pains to transcribe them into long-hand ; as thinking them worthy of being transmitted down to posterity. It is from his manuscripts, this collection is now made public.

SERMON I.*

THE EVERLASTING COVENANT, THE BELIEVER'S SUPPORT UNDER DISTRESS.

Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.—2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

BEFORE I open these words, I shall read the whole context, from the first verse unto the end of the seventh. ‘Now these be the last words of David; David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was,’ &c.

‘Now these be the last words of David;’ not absolutely, for you will find, both in the book of Samuel, and also in the book of Chronicles, that David spake many words after these: but these were the last prophetic words of David; or this is the last prophecy of David: and he gives an account in this prophecy of all the faith and experience he had had in the world; and it comprises also the sum and substance of all he had prophesied of; prophesied of as a king, the anointed of the God of Jacob; and prophesied of as a psalmist, as he was ‘the sweet psalmist of Israel.’

Now there are three parts of this last prophecy of David:

The first of them concerns the subject of all prophecy and promises, that he had preached about and declared, and that is Christ himself, in the third and fourth verses.

The second of them concerns himself, as he was a type of Christ, ver. 5. And

The third part concerns Satan and the enemies of the church, in opposition unto the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

The first part of his prophecy concerns Christ himself; ver. 3, 4. ‘The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me; He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.’ So we have rendered the words; but if you

* This sermon was preached June 27, 1669.

look into the Bible, that [must be] is put into the text, by the misunderstanding of them by interpreters. The words are, מוֹשֵׁל בְּאָדָם צַדִּיק; 'the ruler in or over men, is the just One;' which is Christ himself, who alone is this מוֹשֵׁל, this ruler. The word may be two ways interpreted (for to interpret it of a man that ruleth over men, the word will no way bear it, nor the prophecy); the בְּאָדָם must be, either he that rules in the human nature, is the just One; or he that rules over the human nature, in all saints, 'he is just,' saith he: 'and he rules in' or by 'the fear of God.' As in Isa. xi. 3. it is prophesied of him, 'He shall be of quick understanding in the fear of God;' so here it is prophesied of him, that he shall rule in or by the fear of God; that is the sceptre he shall have in the hearts of men, that is the law he shall put upon the souls of his subjects; he shall rule them neither by outward violence nor force, nor any thing of that nature; but he shall rule them by the fear of God. Ver. 4. declares by sundry comparisons what he shall be: 'Why,' saith he, 'he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds, as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain.' You know how often these things are applied unto Christ. He is called in Malachi, 'the Son of righteousness that ariseth;' chap. iv. 2. He is called 'the day-spring from on high;' Luke i. 78. And he is called 'the bright and morning star;' Rev. xxii. 16. He is both a sun, and morning star, and day-spring. He shall be as the morning that brings light, comfort, joy, refreshment to the church. 'He shall be as a morning without clouds:' there is no darkness in the kingdom of Christ. 'And he shall be as the tender grass springing out of the earth, by clear shining after rain;' the same with that in Isaiah, 'He shall spring up as the tender branch out of the earth.' You know the reason of the allusion; when the grass hath been long dried, and there comes a great rain upon it, and clear shining upon that rain, how will the grass spring up? There was to be a great drought upon the church; but Christ comes, and he was as the rain, and as the sun shining upon the rain; then there was a springing up with great glory, and unto great fruitfulness.

I will at present overlook the fifth verse, to which I am to return; and only shew, that the sixth and seventh verses

do contain a prophecy of the enemies of the church; as this does of Christ. 'Belial shall be thrust away as thorns.' We render it, 'the sons of Belial;' but it is only Belial; 'Belial, all of it, the whole name of Belial.' Sometimes the word is taken for wicked men, and sometimes for the prince of wicked men; as here for the devil and all his agents. And he follows on his allusion, 'that they cannot be taken with hands;' Satan and his seed are so full of thorns and prickles against the church, that you can never seize them by the hand to bring them to any order. And the next verse gives caution how well we must be fenced if we touch them. This is the design of the prophecy.

I now return unto that part, which I shall a little more distinctly open unto you, that concerns David himself as he was chosen to be the great type of Christ. Saith he, 'This ruler of men, he shall be as the clear morning without clouds; although my house be not so with God.'

There are two things in the words:

First, A supposition of a great disappointment and surprisal.

Secondly, A relief against, and under that disappointment and surprisal.

First, A great surprisal and disappointment; 'Although my house be not so with God.' I have looked that it should be otherways, saith he, that my house should have a great deal of glory, especially that my house should be upright with God; but I begin to see it will be otherwise. You may observe David's heart was exceedingly set upon his house; therefore, whenever God spake to him concerning his house, it mightily wrought upon him; as 2 Sam. vii. 18, 19. 'Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come; and is this the manner of man, O Lord God?' Ver. 25. 'And now, O Lord God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and do as thou hast said.' I am sometimes afraid, that David had (as under the Old Testament they generally had) some carnal apprehensions of these spiritual promises that God gave to David's house, which were principally to bring Christ out of his loins,

that should reign for ever: but David thought all things would come well out of his house also. How stands the case now? Now David sees, that in his house Ammon had defiled Tamar, Absalom had slain Ammon for his sin; and he was cut off in his rebellion; and he foresaw, by a spirit of prophecy, that his whole house was like to perish, and be cut down: and so comes to that now, 'Although my house be not so with God.' So that from hence we may take this observation,

That the best of the saints of God, do oftentimes meet with great surprisals and disappointments in the best of their earthly comforts: their houses are not so with God.

I will give you one or two places for this; 1 Chron. vii. 23. 'Ephraim went in to his wife, and she conceived, and bare a son, and he called his name Beriah, because it went evil with his house.' Ephraim had received a special blessing from God by Jacob, for the multiplying of his house; 'He shall be great, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations;' Gen. lxxviii. 19. Now in Ephraim's old age, some of the chief of his sons are killed; 1 Chron. vii. 21, 22. 'There were Zabad, and Shuthelah, and Ezer, and Elead, whom the men of Gath, that were born in that land, slew, because they came down to take away their cattle; and Ephraim their father mourned many days.' And he called his other child Beriah, because it went evil with his house. It was a great surprise unto him, because he had a promise for his house; though God afterwards retrieved it.

You know how great a surprisal befel Job. See what his thoughts were, Job xxix. 18. After, in all the foregoing part of the chapter, he had related the manifold blessings of God upon him in his prosperity, the uprightness of his own heart, his righteousness in his way, as he declares them to the utmost in the beginning of that chapter, he tells you his thoughts; 'Then said I, I shall die in my nest, and I shall multiply my days as the sand.' He expected, from the blessing of God, long life and peace. You know what surprisal befel him, and disappointment to all his comforts in this world, that never man fell into greater; and he gives you an account how great his surprisal was throughout the next chapter.

The reasons hereof, why it may be thus, are,

First, Because there is no promise of the covenant to the contrary. There is no promise of God secures absolutely unto us our outward comforts, be they of what nature they will, be they in our relations, in our enjoyments, in our persons, of what kind they will, why yet we may have a surprisal befall them in reference to them all; because there is no promise of God to secure the contrary, therefore it may be so.

Secondly, Sometimes it is needful it should be so, though we are apt to think the contrary; and that for these three reasons:

1. To keep continually upon our hearts a due awe of the judgments of God; of the actings of God's providence in a way of judgment; which otherwise we should be apt to think ourselves freed from. David testified that this frame was in himself, Psal. cxix. 120. 'My flesh,' saith he, 'trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments.' There ought to be in our hearts, an awe of the judgments of God; 'for our God is a consuming fire;' and if we were secured from surprisals in our own concerns, so fleshly are we, so selfish and carnal, it would be impossible we should keep up a due awe and reverence of the judgments of God. But when these judgments of God may reach our nearest concerns, our lives, and all we enjoy; then doth our flesh tremble in a due manner for fear of him, and we may be afraid of his judgments. A due fear of the judgments of God, is a necessary balance upon the minds of the best of the saints.

2. It is needful to keep us off from security in ourselves. There is such a treachery in our hearts, that we are able to build carnal security upon the spiritual dispensations of God's kindness and love. 'I said I shall never be moved,' saith David. An expression of carnal security. What was the ground? Thou Lord hast made my rock so strong. He built up carnal security upon God's dispensations. It is needful therefore God should sometimes break in upon our concerns, that we may not turn a constant course of his kindness into a sinful security of our own.

3. They are sometimes actually needful to awaken the soul out of such deep sleep of present satisfaction, or love of this world, which nothing else will do. Sometimes we so fall asleep in our own ways, either in our satisfaction, or

projects, and desires, and are so earnest in the pursuit of them, that no ordinary jog will awaken us; it is necessary God should break in upon us in the best of our concerns, and make us put in an 'although' in our course. Although my children live not, and my house be not so with God; although my house be destroyed, &c.

That which we should learn from hence, by way of use, is,

1. Not to put too great a value upon any contentment whatever we have in this world, lest God make us write an 'although' upon it. David seems to have put too great a valuation upon his house, the carnal flourishing of his house; but in his last words, he is forced to come to that, 'Although my house be not so with God;' q. d. what I placed all my hope and expectation upon, that I find is not so with God.

2. Let us be in an expectation of such changes of Providence, that they may not be great surprisals unto us. When we are in peace, let us look for trouble; when we are at liberty, let us look for restraint; and when our children are about us, let us look for the removal of them; and be content to see all our comforts in their winding-sheet every day. It is impossible but our hearts will be too much upon them, unless we keep them in this frame.

The second general observation is this;

That the great reserve and relief for believers, under their surprisals and distresses, lies, in betaking themselves to the covenant of God, or to God in his covenant. Although my house be not so with God; what shall I then do? What will become of me? Yet 'he has made a covenant with me, an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure: This is all my desire, and all my salvation, although he make not my house to grow.' I say, the great relief, and only reserve of believers in their distresses and surprisals, such as may befall them in a very few days, is to betake themselves to God in his covenant.

I will give you some instances of it, Gen. xv. 1, 2. There God leads us to this I now mentioned. Abraham was in a perplexed condition; God comes to him in the first verse, and renews his covenant with him. 'The word of the Lord came unto Abraham in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abraham,

I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.' He minds him of the covenant, and bids him not fear. What is the matter that God comes to Abraham, with this, 'Fear not, Abraham?' The next verse discovers it; and Abraham said, 'Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus.' He was afraid, that all the travail he had taken, in reference to the promise, would come to nothing; and he must leave it to Eliezer of Damascus. Now God comes to give him relief, in minding him of his covenant.

Jacob also relieved his dying spirit with this, upon the foresight of great troubles in his blessing of Dan, Gen. xlix. 16—18. 'Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel.' He alludes to the name Dan, which signifies in Hebrew 'to judge.' When did Dan judge his people? Why in Samson; this is matter of joy to Jacob. But what shall follow? 'Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path; that biteth the horse's heels, so that the rider shall fall backward.' He shall be a serpent and an adder, saith he; that is, idolatry shall be set up in the tribe of Dan, and continue. The first idolatry that was set up in Israel, the work of the serpent, was in the tribe of Dan; Judg. xviii. 30. when the Danites took away the graven image, &c. from Micah, and set it up, and made priests, until the day of the captivity of the land; not the captivity by the Assyrians, but the captivity by the Philistines, when they overcame them, and took away the ark; for then were all those things destroyed at Dan: and afterwards Jeroboam comes and sets up the calf in the same place, and that continued to the last captivity. With what now doth Jacob relieve himself? 'I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord:' he betakes himself to the covenant, and therewith relieves himself against all the trouble which he foresaw was coming upon his posterity in that tribe, which, upon that account, when the other tribes were sealed in the Revelations, was left out, because idolatry first began and ended in Dan.

David expresseth the same course to the height. Psal. xxxi. 10—15. He describes a very sad condition upon all hands. 'My life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing; my strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed. I was a reproach among all my

enemies, but especially among my neighbours, and a fear to mine acquaintance,' &c. Here is sin and reproach, and contempt, and persecution, and danger of his life, all at once fallen upon him. What doth the man do? Why, in the 14th and 15th ver. he tells you, 'But I trusted in thee, O Lord; I said thou art my God; my times are in thy hand.' He betakes himself to the covenant against all these troubles within doors, and without doors, from sin, the world, wicked men, in reproach, contempt, persecution, that had almost slain him: he hath but this relief, he goes to God, and saith, 'Thou art my God,' thou shalt undertake for me against all these. I am not in the hand of sin, nor in the hand of my enemies; but my times of suffering, my time of life and death are in thy hands. He betakes himself unto God's covenant, and there he finds rest. I might multiply instances.

Take one more, wherein the doctrine is plainly held out; Hab. iii. 17, 18. 'Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.' Though my house be not so with God; there is my family gone, the fruits of the earth gone, all is gone; it is no matter, saith the believer, I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. Every word expresses the covenant of God. By these instances it doth appear, that in the most surprising trouble and disappointments, believers do, as David here doth, betake themselves unto God in covenant.

Why do they so? I will give no reason for it, but what lies in the words.

First, They do it, because of the author of the covenant. They consider who it is that makes it with us: because he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, saith David: there is a great emphasis upon that *HE*; who is that? Why it is the Rock of Israel, the God of Israel, *HE* hath made it. It is not a covenant that man hath made with me, nor an angel; but it is a covenant that God hath made with me. And you may observe, that God, whenever he would require our faith or obedience, he doth signally preface his commands and promises with himself. You must know who it is that

commands, and who it is that promises. So in the decalogue, the rule of commands, he prefaceth them with that, 'I am the Lord thy God;' which influences the minds of men unto obedience, and brings them under his authority. And when he made this covenant that David speaks of here, he doth it thus, Gen. xvii. 1. 'I am God Almighty.' This David regards here, when he saith, 'He hath made with me this covenant.' He; who? God Almighty, God All-sufficient; hither I retreat in all my wants and straits. Now, if we make a covenant one with another, we engage all that is in us to make good that covenant; we engage our power and ability, and reputation, and faithfulness. If I have a covenant with any of you, I would reckon upon this covenant, just according unto the esteem I have of your persons, your abilities, reputation, faithfulness; for when you engage in covenant, all you have is engaged. Now God making this covenant, he engages according to his power, goodness, faithfulness; so that we have the reputation of God to secure us in the things of this covenant, his all-sufficiency to assure us of the making good this covenant. So saith the soul, I will retreat unto the covenant, because God hath made it, who is all-sufficient. This makes it a very honourable covenant; it is a covenant made by God; and it makes it a very satisfactory covenant, if all that is in God can give satisfaction unto the soul of a poor creature; and it makes it also a sure covenant, as we shall see afterwards.

This is the first reason why David makes his retreat, in straits and difficulties, unto this covenant, because of the author of it, God himself, who made this covenant.

Secondly, The second reason is taken from the properties of the covenant; what kind of one it is: and they are three. It is an everlasting covenant. It is a covenant that is ordered in all things. And it is a covenant that is sure.

1. It is the great relief of our souls, because it is 'an everlasting covenant.' The things we are troubled about, wherein our comforts consist in this world, are but temporal things; and an everlasting relief against temporal distresses will quite out-balance them.

How is this everlasting? It is everlasting in respect of the beginning of it; it is everlasting in respect of the end of it; and it is everlasting in respect of the matter of it.

(1.) It is everlasting in respect of the beginning of it; it is a covenant that comes from everlasting love, Jer. xxxi. 3. 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love;' what then? 'Therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee.' This drawing with loving kindness is the covenant here mentioned; and whence doth it proceed? from everlasting love. We had never had the drawing of the covenant, had not that been the spring. I will betake myself unto that covenant, which hath its spring in eternity. This covenant had not its beginning when first I laid hold upon it; but it had its beginning in God's love from all eternity.

(2.) It is everlasting in respect of the end of it: it ceases not until it brings the whole person, soul and body, into everlasting glory. So our Saviour manifests, Matt. xxii. 32. There arose a question whether the dead should arise or no, and so the whole person be brought to God in glory; and the Sadducees came to Christ with a pitiful sophistical question about a woman that had had seven husbands, whose wife she should be in the resurrection? Christ answers them; but how doth he prove that there shall be a resurrection? No otherwise but by the words of the covenant, ver. 32. 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.' They live unto God, by virtue of the covenant, unto this day; and, by virtue of the covenant, shall be raised again.

(3.) It is an everlasting covenant upon the account of the matter of it, the things concerning which it is. It is not a covenant about corn and wine and oil; about the growing of our houses, the increase of our families or selves in the world: but it is a covenant about everlasting things; 'things that are not seen;' 2 Cor. iv. 18. Grace is eternal, mercy eternal, spiritual life and joy and comfort are all eternal things. 'This is life eternal, that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent;' John xvii. 3. Not only eternal glory, but the grace we have here by virtue of the covenant is eternal. It is not about the land of Canaan, thrones and kingdoms; it is not about the prosperity of our families, saith he, but about everlasting things.

Now is there not here great ground for retreat unto this

covenant in all our straits, that hath its rise in everlasting love, its end in everlasting rest, and the matter whereof are all everlasting things. This is the first property of it; and a reason why we ought to make it our relief, because it is an everlasting covenant.

2. The second property of this covenant is, 'That it is ordered in all things.' What is order? Order is the disposition of things into such a way, such a relation one to another, and such a dependance one upon another, as they may all be suited to attain their proper end. This is order. Now, saith he, this covenant is ordered. The truth is, order is the beauty of all things, the glory of all things; and it is but a little, I acknowledge, that I am able to look into, of the order of this covenant, which renders it exceeding beautiful and glorious, and much less that I shall now speak unto you.

I would refer the order of the covenant to these three heads; to its infinitely wise projection; to its solemn confirmation; and to its powerful execution. These three things give this covenant its order. Its infinitely wise projection, in the love and eternal wisdom of the Father; its solemn confirmation, in the blood and sacrifice of the Son; and its powerful execution, in the efficacy of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of grace. These are the heads of the glorious order of this covenant, that gives it its life, beauty, and glory.

(1.) Its projection was in the wisdom and love of the Father. Whatsoever is spoken concerning the love, grace, and wisdom of the Father, before the world was, was laid out in the projection of this covenant. Take it as it wraps Christ in it, as it brings forth the forgiveness of sin, as it is the centre of grace; and it compriseth the whole effect of divine wisdom, as far as the infinitely holy God ever manifested, or ever will manifest to eternity.

(2.) It had a solemn confirmation in the blood of the Son: hence the blood of Christ is called 'the blood of the covenant.' The covenant was solemnly confirmed in the blood of Christ. It is the design of the apostle, in the tenth chapter of the Hebrews, to prove the solemn confirmation of the new covenant, in the blood of the Son of God, that makes it irrevocable and unchangeable.

(3.) But when all this is done, how shall this covenant be executed? Why, that is the work of the Holy Spirit. He hath undertaken two things. [1.] To assure our souls of all things on the part of God; to reveal the terms of the covenant, and make known unto us the end of God in it. And [2.] to undertake on our parts to give us hearts, that we shall love him, and fear him; to write the terms of the covenant on our part in our souls; so that it shall have an infallible execution. If any thing had been wanting in this order, we could never had benefit by this covenant.

There is an addition of order, in reference to the matter of it, here expressed: as it is ordered, 'so it is ordered in all things:' it is ordered in all the things 'of grace on the part of God;' it is ordered in all the things 'of sin on our part.' (1.) It is ordered in all the things 'of grace on the part of God,' that all grace whatsoever, that is needful for the covenanters, shall be given out unto them. If there were any needful grace that we should come short of, in reference unto the end of this covenant, it would not be ordered in all things. If the covenant had been ordered but in some grace, in quickening grace, and not in persevering grace, we had never come to the end of the covenant; if in pardoning grace, and not renewing grace, we had never come to the end of the covenant; 'for without holiness no man shall see the Lord.' But whatsoever grace is needful to bring us to the enjoyment of God, it is ordered in all grace. The first covenant with Adam was ordered in grace, but not in all grace; it was ordered in righteousness, holiness, and innocency, but not ordered in the grace of perseverance; and, failing in that grace, the whole covenant failed: but this covenant is ordered in all things, with reference to believers. (2.) It is ordered in reference unto sin. There was a great deal of glory and beauty in the first covenant; but there was no order taken about sin; that, if any sin came in, the first covenant was gone and broken, and of no use any more. But this covenant hath taken order about sin; that there shall no sin befall believers, but what the grace of the covenant will extend pardon unto. If a believer should fall into any one sin, that would deprive him of the benefit of this covenant, it would not be ordered in all things. There are sins, that, if a believer should fall into,

would break the covenant; but the covenant prevents such falls.

This is another motive to rely upon this covenant, because it is ordered in all things. What could God provide more for poor creatures?

3. The last property of this covenant is, that it is sure. It is 'ordered in all things, and sure.' If it had not been sure, it would not have been a relief unto us. The springs of the security of this covenant are two: (1.) The oath of God; (2.) The intercession of Christ.

God hath confirmed this covenant by his oath; and that gives surety in itself, and security unto us; Heb. vi. 17, 18.

And it is made sure by the interposition of Christ. He 'is made the surety of a better covenant;' Heb. vii. 22. And he lives for ever to make intercession for them that come unto God by him, and so is able to save unto the utmost; ver. 25.

This is what I have to offer from the opening of the words, and the reasons contained in them, why they are the great relief and reserve of believers in all the surprisals, disappointments, and distresses, that may befall them; and we are marvellously unwise, if we do not live in a constant expectation of such surprisals. To say, that we shall die in our nests, and our mountain is so strong that it shall not be moved, this is carnal security.

I will answer one question, and I have done.

How do believers betake themselves to this covenant for relief? Or, what may we do, that we may betake ourselves unto it for our relief in our surprisals and distresses?

I answer, first, The first way is, by faith to get a due and dear valuation of the things of the covenant, above all things we here enjoy in this world. We shall never have relief by it, until we value the things of it as we ought; and those who do so shall never want relief from it.

Secondly, We should seek unto God in covenant, for strength to support us under our surprisals and distresses. When Abraham was going to battle, he took with him Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner, who were the men of his covenant; Gen. xiv. 13. When our souls are engaged in battle with our sins, oppositions, and fears, let us take with us the men of our covenant, I mean, take God with us, seek

strength from the covenant, it is the way to support under soul surprisals.

Thirdly and lastly, We must resolve finally to take up our rest in the covenant of God, and not in other things. In Isa. xxx. 15. God brings it to this; 'Thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, in returning and rest shall ye be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.' God, when he proposes the covenant unto us, doth it, that we should take up our rest and confidence alone in that. 'But ye would not, but said, We will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee.' If we have other reserves, the covenant will never be a stable reserve unto us.

SERMON II.*

ON THE EVERLASTING COVENANT.

Although my house, &c.—2 Sam. xxiii: 5.

I DO remember I have spoken in this place formerly from these words; and delivered somewhat concerning the covenant of God, so far as the exposition of the words did lead me.

I shall now add only one consideration, which is taken from the introduction of David's retreat unto, and assertion of, the everlasting covenant in this place; and that is in these words, 'Although my house be not so with God.'

David took a prospect now in his latter days, of all the distresses and calamities that should assuredly come upon his family; and it may be, he had regard unto those great and dreadful breaches that had before been made upon it, in the sins and judgments that ensued upon some of his children. This was enough to work in him a consternation of spirit and trouble of mind; and, in the view and prospect of it, he repairs for his relief unto the covenant of God; 'Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure.' What I would observe from it is this:

Under present distresses, and the saddest prospect of future troubles, it is the duty, and wisdom, and privilege of believers, to betake themselves for relief and support unto the covenant of God. Nothing can befall them, no case happen, for which there is no relief provided; and it is the greatest and best relief that can be provided for any case whatsoever.

Having laid down this assertion, the substance of what I shall do at present is, but to confirm it with some Scripture instances, and the practice of believers in former ages.

* This sermon was preached Jan. 1, 1670.

We have one instance in Gen. xxviii. 3, 4. Isaac was sending away his son Jacob unto Padan-aram, to take him a wife; and he might easily know, and did no doubt, what troubles, and distresses, and dangers, would befall Jacob in that great undertaking. And one would somewhat wonder, why so great a man as Isaac was, should send away his son with no better provision than Jacob was sent away with. He gives the account of it, I had nothing but my staff; 'With my staff,' saith he, 'I went over Jordan.' But it seems, that temporal blessings being then a great token and evidence of God's covenant mercies, he would have Jacob work for himself, that he might have experience of God's blessing him in what he did. He should try God by his own experience. And what provision doth he give him, besides his staff, for this great undertaking? It is this, ver. 3, 4. 'God Almighty bless thee, and give thee the blessing of Abraham.' Why does he say, 'God Almighty?' Because that was the name whereby God revealed himself to Abraham, when he entered into covenant with him in Gen. xvii. 1. 'I am the Almighty God.' Isaac calls his son Jacob to renew his covenant interest with God, and to betake himself unto the blessing of the covenant, against that long and hazardous journey he was to go, against the hard, false, oppressive, deceitful dealing he was to meet with, against the dangers he was to encounter. He gives him the covenant for his security. And Jacob was not wanting to take the same course himself, Gen. xxxii. 9. and so onward: he was in as great a distress, and under as just a fear, as ever man was in this world, or could be in; and so he expresses his fear unto God, ver. 11. 'Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother, with the children.' He feared the universal destruction of himself and family, and so the failing of the promise he had received, and which he had pursued through so many difficulties and dangers. What course now doth Jacob take? Why, he appeals to the covenant, ver. 9. 'O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac;' which was the plea whereby they did plead the covenant that God entered solemnly into with them. Two things, it is evident, Jacob pleaded in this very great distress: one was the co-

venant that God made with Abraham; that is, the covenant of grace; for so he doth, ver. 9. He refers unto what blessing Isaac gave him when he went away; God Almighty bless thee, and give thee the blessing of Abraham. And, secondly, he appeals unto that particular covenant engagement, which he himself had made unto God; for in chap. xxviii. 13. God comes unto him, and renews his covenant. 'And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac;' and thereupon Jacob renews his covenant in particular with God, ver. 21. 'If God will be with me, and keep me in this way, then shall the Lord be my God.' These two things doth Jacob in his great distress, he minds the covenant in general, and the particular covenant engagement God had brought him into; for so he pleads, 'Thou saidst unto me, return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee.' Where did he say so? He said so in chap. xxxi. 13. When Jacob made his covenant with God, he pleaded these two things, in the greatest distress that could befall him in this world.

Shall I give you one instance more? David gives it us in his own person, Psal. xxxi. 9—13. He makes as sad a complaint of such a complication of distresses upon him, as there is any where extant in the whole book of the Psalms. 'Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am in trouble; mine eye is consumed with grief, yea my soul, and my belly,' &c. I could easily manifest, what a confluence of evil this holy man was now under; within, iniquities prevailed, and the fear of them; and without, friends forsook him, and enemies took counsel to take away his life. Whereunto doth he retreat? What doth he seek for relief in? What is the contrivance of this man of wisdom and courage, and interest in the world? See ver. 14. 'But I trusted in thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my God;' and this put an end to all his difficulties. But this matter I have hinted in a former sermon.

It were an easy thing to multiply instances, both of particular persons, and the church in general, who were taught this wisdom of God, and knew this to be their duty, To let go all other vain contrivances, and to take up their relief

only in the covenant of God; as David doth here in the text.

Let us see a little more into the nature of it, that it may give us encouragement to our duty. And,

First, When a man betakes himself for relief unto God's covenant, 'he doth put God in mind of it,' wherewith he is greatly delighted; because therein he hath wrapped up his greatest glory in this world; and God is greatly delighted to be put in remembrance of that wherein he hath wrapped up the glory of his grace. It was Jacob's argument, when he wrestled with God, and prevailed; as signal an instance of the work of faith, and the deportment of a believer under great distresses, as the whole Old Testament affords us; and is given as an example to confirm our faith, Hos. xii. 4. 'Thou saidst thou wouldst surely do me good;' Gen. xxxii. 12. He put God in mind of what he had said to him, when he made the covenant with him; and you know what a glorious issue it had. Jacob could not have done any thing more pleasing and acceptable unto God, than to put him in remembrance of what, out of his goodness, grace and bounty, he had promised; for he professes that 'he was not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which God had shewed unto him;' I plead not any thing, says he, of my own deservings; but, 'Lord, didst thou not say thou wouldst do me good?' God is greatly pleased with being remembered of the effects of his own grace, and wherein he hath wrapped so much of his own glory.

Secondly, As God would have us mind him of the covenant, 'so his remembrance of it, is still laid at the bottom of all the good he doth unto us,' and of all the dispensations of his love and grace.

God made a covenant with Noah, and with all the world in him; wherein he gave the preservation of the world, from a universal destruction, in covenant unto his saints; for the world is at this day, and to the last will be preserved upon this account, that God hath given the preservation of it in covenant unto Noah, and to them that succeed in the faith of Noah. But how comes it to pass, that God will destroy this world no more with a flood, when he had made this covenant? Saith God, 'I will set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of the covenant; and the bow shall be

in the cloud, and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature.' It is spoken after the manner of men, when they have made an engagement, that they will do such a thing; it may be out of their mind, but if you remind them of it by a token, then they will recover their memory, and do according to their engagement. Now, saith God, I will take it upon myself, to remind myself. And when he remembers the covenant, what will he do? Then I will restrain my wrath and indignation, and I will destroy the earth no more. The withholding of troubles, judgments, and desolations, is laid in God's remembering of the covenant. It is all comprised together, Luke i. 72—75. 'To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant, the oath which he sware to our father Abraham that he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.' All deliverance from our enemies, of whom we are afraid; all communication of grace and of spiritual strength, to enable us to serve God in holiness and righteousness; it all springs from this, God's remembering of his covenant.

Now he that retreats to God in his distresses, reminds God of his covenant; 'Thou saidst thou wouldst do me good.' And the bringing forth of God's word of promise, is as good a token as his own bringing forth the bow in the cloud. And this is the foundation of all the good he doth for us or in us.

Thirdly, 'What is there in the covenant, that God doth thus remember,' that will give us relief in times of distress, and in our prospect of future calamities that may befall us? and what are we to have regard unto, that may give us that relief? I answer,

1. God himself is in it; there lies the nature of it. When he came to make it with Abraham, 'I am God Almighty,' saith he: He doth not speak a word there what he will do for Abraham, but 'I am God Almighty;' he leaves it there, then requires his obedience, 'Walk before me, and be thou perfect.' Abraham shall rest in this, that God himself is in the covenant; for the rest that is to be done, trust me with it, I take that upon myself. And, saith he, Hos. ii. 23.

‘They shall be my people, and I will be their God.’ Here we have the eternal fountain and spring of all relief (if our houses are not so as we could desire), that is, God himself. So that, if there be any thing in the nature of God, in his infinite, eternal excellency, that is suited to the relief of a soul, he hath made his covenant sufficient to convey it unto the souls of believers. And what we come short of, is not for want of fulness in the fountain, and ability in the means of conveyance, but for want of faith to receive it.

2. Christ is in the covenant, Gal. iii. 16. ‘To Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.’ In all the promises made to Abraham, Christ as the seed, was intended, so that Christ shall be theirs with all his benefits. This is also in it. And,

3. All the promises of God are in it, which are in unspeakable variety, as effects of infinite wisdom, suited unto the wants that may befall us in this world. So, as that it is utterly impossible that any believer should ever want any thing, that there is not grace in one promise or other suited unto that want. They all belong unto the covenant. Consider the fountain of it, God himself, who is inexhaustible in stores of help and grace: consider the means of procuring; Christ is in it, who hath purchased for us every thing that is needful; and, lastly, consider the means of communication, which are the promises; so that there is nothing wanting for our relief.

Fourthly, If we would have relief in the covenant, let us consider our own entering into covenant with God, and what is comprised therein. Whosoever entereth into covenant with God, he doth accept God to be his God, for all the ends of the covenant whatever. And he that will retreat for relief unto the covenant, must stand to the covenant. And in this acceptance of God to be our God, there are two things:

1. An absolute renunciation of all expectation of any help for the ends of the covenant, from any other thing whatsoever. For what we look for therein (and therein we look for all), there is to be an express renunciation of any expectation from any thing else to that end and purpose. So do they in Jer. iii. 22, 23. ‘Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the Lord our God. Truly in vain is salvation hoped

for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel.' Things are called hills and mountains, because they make a great and goodly appearance of help and relief. The people here are directed to take up their relief in God alone; 'We come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God.' What is required hereunto? Why, an absolute renunciation of all help and assistance from the hills, and from the mountains. And one great reason why we are so slow in drinking in that relief, which God is so willing to give out unto us, is, because we are still casting our eyes towards the hills and mountains, looking this way and that way for something that may give us relief; but it is in vain, there is an absolute renunciation of all other help included in accepting of God to be our God in covenant. So Hos. xiv. 3. 'Ashur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy.' And if there hath not been a solemn renunciation of other helps in our covenant with God, it is no wonder we do so halt as we do, between God and the world, when we come to our straits and distresses. Where this hath been firm in the soul, and he is nakedly cast upon God as a poor fatherless creature, to find mercy in him; and goes to him and saith, Truly thou art our God, in thee is our help; that soul shall not fail of such supplies as shall be needful for him in his condition. This leads to observe,

The next thing to be done is, 'an actual resting upon God,' or casting of ourselves upon him for all things.

Where these things are not, we do, in speaking of the covenant, but flatter God with our lips. There is no solemn covenant between God and us. This God required when he came to Abraham; saith he, 'Fear not, Abraham:' Why so? 'I am thy shield, and exceeding great reward.' Why so? Consider the condition of Abraham, and you will see what reason there was for God to give himself that title in this renewing of the covenant unto him. Abraham was in a wandering condition up and down the world, exposed to dangers, injuries, distresses from every hand. He knew not whether there was the fear of God in any place where he came. 'Fear not, Abraham,' saith God, 'I am thy shield,' trust me for thy protection, trust me for thy deliverance out

of danger. But, saith Abraham, I am engaged in a long and wearisome pilgrimage; 'and now, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless.' Men will labour and take pains for their posterity in an ordinary way. Abraham had not only that thought about his posterity, but also about the promise: Why, saith God, 'I am thy reward;' a sufficient reward unto thee for all thy labour and travail, and sufferings. We would be glad to be freed from danger, freed from trouble in our pilgrimage, which encompasses us on every hand: and there is none of us, but would be glad to see some reward, some prosperity of the church of God in this world, and deliverance from trouble. But if we truly enter into covenant with God, we are to take him as a full satisfaction for all our dangers, for all our labours, though we see not the fruit of them in this world. He that enters into covenant with God, takes God for his protection and reward, and him alone. Had we but the power of these things in our hearts, it would alleviate all our troubles, and ease us under all our dangers, fears, distresses, and disappointments.

Fifthly, If we would find relief in the covenant, we may do well to consider upon what terms we did enter into covenant with God. Now entering into covenant with God, is twofold;

1. It may be explicit, as when it comes to these express terms mentioned, Hos. iii. 3. 'Thou shalt not be for another man: so will I also be for thee.' Some persons have laid the foundation of their obedience in direct express covenanting with God. And,

2. Sometimes it is implicitly wrought; as where God in the conversion of men, deals with them as he saith he will do with the church, Hos. ii. 14. 'I will allure them into the wilderness, and there speak comfortably unto them.' God by little and little, various workings and reasonings of the Spirit by the word upon the heart and affections, doth allure them from their former state, draws them aside to himself in the wilderness, there treats with them, and by little and little speaks comfort unto them; and so at length makes up the marriage covenant, which he mentions in ver. 19, and 'betroths them to himself for ever.' So it is with many: God hath, as to this covenant with himself, allured them, though

it would be useful, if not needful, for such persons, solemnly and expressly upon some occasions to renew their covenant with God as Jacob did.

Now as to those whom God hath thus taken into covenant, whom he hath thus allured, there are always these two things upon their minds, in their thus entering into covenant with God, which we may do well to consider and remember.

(1.) That they do surely accept God in Christ for himself, and make no conditions about peace and prosperity, and freedom from trouble in this world. Naaman made a reserve, that he would bow in the house of Rimmon, and that spoiled his whole covenant. Whoever hath in sincerity thus engaged in covenant with God, his own soul will bear him witness that he made no condition, had no reserve. And the proffer of any one condition to God or Christ whatever, is enough to ruin the whole marriage contract he tenders to us. Now for a man to faint and sink under any thing that befalls him, let him retreat unto the covenant, and inquire there whether ever he made a condition against it, against imprisonment, banishment, poverty, losses, troubles, distresses: did he say, if God would keep him from all these? God made no such condition with him. What God hath actually engaged before in promise, that we may plead with him as a condition, for Jacob did so; 'If thou wilt be with me, and bless me.' God had given him that promise; 'Thou saidst, I will deal well with thee, and I will surely do thee good;' but not else.

(2.) You may remember, with what affections you engaged unto God. It is a marriage covenant; Jer. iii. 14. 'I am married unto you,' saith God; and Isa. liv. 5. 'Thy Maker is thy husband; the Lord of hosts is his name.' And there is nothing more eminent in the marriage covenant, than a mighty prevalency of affection. I should much doubt whether I had really entered into covenant with God, if I had never found any thing of entire marriage affections towards God in Christ for himself. That soul that can under his distresses repair to some sense and experience of the prevalency of his affections in it formerly, it will relieve him against all his troubles, and only make him cry out for such affections unto God again: that will fully satisfy, when they are drawn out unto him. The remembrance and call-

ing over of these things, will greatly relieve and support a soul, whatever its distress or perplexity may be.

Sixthly, I have one consideration more, which is the last I shall insist upon; and that is, to consider in this covenant, whereunto I make my retreat, 'Who it is that hath made it with me.' And therein I would consider two things; the one whereof will have the endearment of admiration, and the other will have full and plenary satisfaction.

Why, it is God that hath made this covenant with us: he hath made with me, saith David. If a great, a mighty king and prince of the earth, had made a covenant with us, and confirmed it solemnly by his oath to take care of all our concerns; so carnal, and so fleshly are we, that it would give us great relief against imminent danger and hazards. But who hath made this covenant with us? God hath made it; and two things are considerable in this: 1. His condescension in entering into this covenant; 2. His sufficiency to satisfy us in it.

1. His condescension. And we may consider the condescension of God, upon the account of his greatness, upon the account of his holiness, and upon the account of his self-sufficiency.

(1.) Upon the account of his greatness. You may observe in sundry places, that where God doth mention his covenant, or the fruits of his covenant, he doth oftentimes mention his greatness with it. So, Isa. lvii. 15. 'Thus saith the Lord, the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity; I will dwell with him also' (which is God's covenant) 'that is of a contrite and humble spirit.' The high and lofty One will condescend to dwell with the poor and humble. And Stephen, Acts vii. 2. mentioning God's calling of Abraham, saith he, 'The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham.' That the high and the lofty One, the great and the glorious God, should enter into this covenant with poor dust and ashes, worms of the earth as we are! the Lord help us to understand it. Condescension is endearing and satisfying: we find it so among men. If a man that is great in the world, doth but condescend to respect and be familiar towards them that are poor, that are beggars, it is looked upon as a very great matter, and doth wonderfully engage such persons to them that thus condescend. But let that

distance be what it will that is between the highest and greatest king and the meanest beggar, they are men still ; and, upon some accounts, the meanest may be the better. But there is an infinite distance between God and us, between the high and the lofty One, the glorious God, the possessor of heaven and earth, and poor dust and ashes : that he should take us into covenant, and engage himself by oath for the accomplishment of it ; and should accept of our answering of his covenant, and engaging of our hearts unto him that he should be ours, and that we should be his. No heart can fully conceive this condescension. But

(2.) There is greater condescension yet ; and that is, his great condescension with respect unto his holiness. It is a great condescension of God, upon the account of his greatness, to enter into covenant with man ; but it is a greater condescension for the holy God to enter into covenant with sinful man : and therefore, though there was great grace, and great excellency in the first covenant, wherein the Creator entered into covenant with the creature ; yet the second covenant is far more excellent and mysterious, where the holy God entered into covenant with sinners. In the first covenant there was no need of a mediator ; but when a covenant is made between the holy God and sinners, there comes in the person of Jesus Christ, which shews infinite condescension on the part of God.

(3.) Consider his condescension upon the account of his self-sufficiency. Though God be thus great, and though he be thus holy, yet may he not, however, have some use of poor man ? May he not have some need of his service ? As the greatest men upon earth have some need of their subjects and tenants, they have a revenue out of them : but God had no need of us at all, or of that service we tender him by virtue of this covenant. Psal. xvi. 2. ' O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord ;' what then will he do for God : ' my goodness extends not unto thee.' It is true, thou art my God in a way of mere sovereign grace ; but what I can do reaches not unto thee. So he saith, Job xxxv. 6—8. ' If thou sinnest, what doest thou against him ? or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what doest thou unto him ? If thou be righteous, what givest thou him ? or what receiveth he of thine hand ? Thy wickedness may hurt a

man as thou art; and thy righteousness may profit the Son of man.' God receives no profit, no advantage by it; so that it is an infinite condescension in God with respect to his self-sufficiency, and that upon two accounts; [1.] Upon the absolute, eternal self-sufficiency of his own nature. All the creatures in the world add nothing to God's state of blessedness. He made them, not that he might have advantage by them; but that he might communicate of his own goodness unto them. He was no less infinitely eternally-blessed before a creature was made to contemplate his glory, than he is now. [2.] Suppose all those he takes into covenant should fail him, 'he can out of stones raise up children unto Abraham;' he can bring up another people that may serve him to his praise and glory.

That is the first thing that will greatly refresh our souls under distresses, if we consider God's gracious condescension in taking us into covenant with him, upon the account of his greatness, his holiness, and his self-sufficiency; and it is an endearing condescension. 'What am I,' said Elizabeth, 'that the mother of my Lord should come unto me?' Much more may we say, what are we, that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ should thus come unto us, to take us into covenant with himself?

2. It will be a relief, if we consider God's all-sufficiency to 'satisfy our souls' in every state and condition. This he made the ground of his covenant with Abraham; 'I am God Almighty.' And, if there be any want in God, we are freed from the terms of the covenant; that I may speak it to aggravate the sin of our instability, and the not taking up full satisfaction in him. 'But is it so?' saith God, 'Have I been a wilderness unto you, or a barren heath? As waters that fail?' Have we, at any time, in our own experience, failed of any thing all our life long hitherto? Have we wanted any thing? Our want arises because we will not admit, we will not receive; or we long after other things which God is not pleased we should have. There is in God an all-sufficiency of grace and mercy to pardon us; there is an all-sufficiency of spiritual strength to support us and carry us through all our difficulties; there is an all-sufficiency of goodness and beauty to satisfy us; and there is an all-sufficiency of power and glory to reward us.

(1.) There is in God, to meet with our wants, an all-sufficiency of grace and 'mercy to pardon us:' Tit. iii. 3, 4. The apostle having made a description of what we were before our conversion to God, and notwithstanding all the paint we put upon ourselves, has given us a character as black as hell; 'We ourselves were foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.' How were we delivered? 'The kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared.' God, who is rich in grace, of his mercy wherewith he loved us in Christ, notwithstanding that cursed condition of ours, pardons, sanctifies, and saves us. There is an all-sufficiency of grace and mercy in God, I say, to pardon us. Where is there a believer that cannot say, he has found God all-sufficient to pardon sin?

(2.) There is an all-sufficiency of spiritual 'strength in God to support us.' Here lies our great strait and perplexity, the experience of our own weakness, of the unspeakable variety of temptations wherewith we are exercised, of oppositions that we meet withal, especially in such a time wherein the floods lift up their voice and rage. Who shall be able to go through all these difficulties? these remaining trials, temptations, troubles of our pilgrimage? How shall we be able to withstand them? I know not how it is with others, but it is a wonder to myself, that my soul is alive, considering what is come already: But 'there is the residue of the Spirit with God.' He tells you, Isa. xl. 28. to the end, that he will not faint in this work of giving out grace and spiritual strength; 'He will give power to the faint; and to them that have no might, he will increase strength.' He is able to carry us through all, and cause us to sing, because of his majesty, in the very fire.

(3.) There is an all-sufficiency of goodness and beauty in God to satisfy our souls. We are scattering away our affections 'upon every high hill, and under every green tree, Jer. ii. 20. looking for, and seeking after satisfaction from perishing things; but we find them all vanity and vexation of spirit: they will appear so unto us. But, 'How great is his goodness? How great is his beauty?' Zech. ix. 17. O the excellency and desirableness of God to satisfy and

fill all the affections of our hearts in every state and condition !

(4.) And lastly, there is an all-sufficiency in God 'to reward us' when we shall be here no more. The lion lies at the door, death is ready to seize upon us. Let our condition be what it will, we are entering into eternity : but God hath engaged himself by covenant to be our God ; he hath promised to carry us through the dark shade, and to crown our souls with glory. ' Be thou faithful to death, and I will give thee a crown of life.'

SERMON III.*

Wherefore, he saith, when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.—Eph. iv. 8.

THE design of these words is to shew, that the gift of the ministry, and of ministers, of the office, and persons to discharge that office, is an eminent fruit of the exaltation of Christ, and a great expression and pledge of his care and love towards his church; and that is my doctrine, which I shall speak unto from them.

First, It is a gift, 'Αυτὸς ἔδωκεν, ver. 11. 'He himself gave.' The foundation of the ministry is in the gift of Christ. Let me answer that question which he put once to the Pharisees, 'The baptism of John, is it from heaven? or is it of men?' In like manner, I say, the ministry, is it from heaven? or is it of men? The answer is, in the text, He gave; it is the gift of Christ. It is also the great promise, that he would do so; Jer. iii. 15. 'I will give you pastors according to my own heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.' When shall that be? 'When,' saith he, 'I shall take you, one of a city and two of a family, and bring you to Zion,' as it is said in ver. 14. Or, when I shall call you by the gospel, then I will give you pastors according to my own heart. And that this is a promise of the gospel, and so intended in that place of Jeremiah, you may see, chap. xxiii. 4. where the promise is repeated, 'I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them.' Ver. 5. 'When I raise unto David a righteous branch, a king that shall reign and prosper.' It is the great promise that, under the gospel, Christ would give ministers to his church.

It may be said, we know how Christ gave apostles when he was on earth; he called them, chose them, sent them; but how doth Christ now continue to give ministers to his church? That we may not claim an interest in a gift, and a privilege that we have no right unto—I say, by four ways

* This sermon was preached at the ordination of a minister, Jan. 23, 1673.

or means doth Christ continue to give ministers in all ages unto his church. The church is to consider them as that which is the bottom and foundation of the duties they perform, and of the work undertaken this day.

First, He doth it 'by the standing law, ordinance, and institution of the gospel,' whereby he hath appointed this office of the ministry in the church, as the great Mediator of it. All the saints in the world, all the disciples of Christ, neither could nor ought (whatever necessity they could have thought they had seen of it, whatever congruity from the light of nature) to have appointed teachers nor officers among them, neither could it ever have been blessed unto their advantage, if Christ had not, by a standing ordinance and law, appointed such an office : and if that law comes to an end, if its obligation ceases, the work of the ministry, and the whole office of it must cease also : but if this ordinance be, 'as the ordinances of heaven,' of the sun, moon, and stars, that change not, it shall never be altered in this world. It is plain then, the neglect of the work and office of the ministry is so far a rebellion against the authority of Christ. 'All power,' saith he, Matt. xxviii. 18, 19. 'is given to me in heaven and earth; therefore go preach the gospel, and I am with you to the end of the world.' He is exalted, and he gives some to be pastors and some to be teachers, until all the elect of God are brought unto the unity of the faith, and unto a perfect man; unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

Secondly, The second thing he doth, is 'the giving spiritual gifts' unto men, whereby they may be enabled unto the discharge of the office of the ministry, as to the edification of the church, in all the ends of it. Gifts make no man a minister; but all the world cannot make a minister of Christ, without gifts. If the Lord Jesus Christ should cease to give out spiritual gifts unto men for the work of the ministry, he need do no more to take away the ministry itself; it must cease also : and it is the very way the ministry ceases in apostatising churches, Christ no more giving out unto them of the gifts of his Spirit; and all their outward forms and order, which they can continue, are of no signification in his sight.

Thirdly, Christ doth it by giving power unto his church

to call persons to that office, by him appointed and prepared by the gifts he bestows. And you may observe three things concerning this power.

1. That this power in the church is not despotical, lordly, and absolute. It is not from any authority of their own; but it consists in an absolute compliance with the command of Christ; it is but the doing what Christ hath commanded, and that gives virtue, efficacy, and power unto it. Look not upon us as though, by our power and our virtue, may the church say, we have made this man a minister this day. It is in the name and authority of Jesus Christ alone by which we act; in obedience unto that, he is so constituted and appointed.

2. There is no power in any church to choose any one whom Christ hath not chosen before; i. e. No church can make a man formally a minister, that Christ hath not made so materially; if I may so say. If Christ hath not pre-instructed and prefurnished him with gifts, it is not in the power of the church to choose or call him. And where these two things are, where the law of Christ is the foundation, and where the gifts of Christ are the preparative; thereupon the church calls, and persons are constituted elders by the Holy Ghost, and overseers of the flock, as in Acts xx. 28. Because he gave the law of the office, and because he gave these gifts to the officers, therefore are they constituted by the Holy Ghost. They were the ordinary elders of the church of Ephesus, to whom the apostle gives in charge 'to feed the flock of God, over which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers.'

3. The way whereby the church doth call or constitute any person into this office thus appointed, is by giving themselves up unto him in the Lord, which they testify by their solemn choice and election by suffrage: the way, I say, is by submitting themselves unto him in the Lord, witnessing it by their solemn suffrage in the choice of him. 2 Cor. viii. 5. 'And this they did,' saith the apostle, viz. the saints of Macedonia, 'not as we hoped,' much beyond our expectation, 'but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.' It is the great work you have to do, let me tell you, of this church, in your calling of an officer, to give up yourselves unto him by the will of God, to be led, guided, in-

structed, directed, to have the work of the ministry fulfilled among you to your edification : and this submission, wherein (as I could evince by arguments sufficient) the essence of the call doth consist, is to be testified by suffrage or by choice. When God ordered the Levites to be set apart unto the service of the tabernacle, in the name, and on the behalf of the whole congregation ; to shew what weight he laid upon the consent and suffrage of the people, he caused all the people to come together, and to lay their hands upon them ; Num. viii. 9, 10. ‘Thou shalt bring the Levites before the tabernacle of the congregation ; and thou shalt gather the whole assembly of the children of Israel together :’ all the church. ‘And thou shalt bring the Levites before the Lord, and the children of Israel shall put their hands upon the Levites :’ viz. to testify their consent in their solemn dedication to the Lord, to minister in the tabernacle in their name, and on their behalf.

We have, in the New Testament, thirteen times mentioned the setting apart of ministers unto their office ; some of which I shall mention. The first account is in Acts i. 15. unto the end. It was while they were praying, upon a sermon of Peter’s, which he preached unto them, that they went about their work ; ‘for every thing is sanctified by the word and prayer.’ There was an apostle to be called. But here God was to have a peculiar, sovereign interposition, and to give a special manifestation of his own divine choice ; so that it could not be absolutely left unto the choice of the church. Yet thus far they went, that, antecedently unto God’s choice, ‘they appointed two ;’ v. 23. This was the first church act that ever was performed in the New Testament. There was in it a pattern to be laid for after times and ages. Let the church proceed as far as possible with a reserve to the sovereignty of God. ‘They appointed two ;’ so far, I say, they went : and then God took his man. But still, to preserve the liberty of the church herein, it is added, when God had taken him, *συγκατεψηφίσθη*, he was, by common suffrage, as the word signifies, reckoned among the apostles. There was antecedently allowed them the choice of two ; and consequently, their common suffrage, that he should be among the number of the apostles. The next call we have is in Acts vi. which is the ‘call of deacons ;’ where

the whole matter is, by the assembly of apostles, referred unto the body of the church. One would wonder how such a forgetfulness should befall a world of men who call themselves Christians, to do all these things without them, as though the church had no concern in them, when the whole body of the apostles, being assembled together (who had all the power and authority in their hands, as Christ had committed unto any of the children of men), direct the church to use what power Christ had intrusted them with. 'Brethren,' say they, 'look out from among yourselves;' ver. 3. 'And the saying pleased the whole multitude;' ver. 5. 'And they chose Stephen, a man full of the Holy Ghost;' and so the rest, who were afterward set apart. If all the apostles were upon the earth together, where there was in truth a church of Christ, called according to his mind, they would not undertake to deprive the church of their liberty, which any man now, who is far from an apostle, you know, will take upon him at any time. A third Scripture, where it is mentioned, is Acts xiv. 23. 'And when they had ordained them elders in every church,' &c. I confess, I am not free to manage the argument now from this place, although it is the most cogent; because it depends merely and purely upon the signification of the original word. Only this I would recommend to you, that before interest had guided men in what they had to do, all the translations, that were extant in English, did read this text, 'And ordained them elders by election,' as the word doth signify: so you will find it in your old translations. But since, it was left out to serve a turn. We may freely say, there is no one instance to be found in the whole New Testament, concerning the practical part of communicating an office unto any person, but it is peculiarly also declared, that it was done by the election of the multitude, or the body of the church.

This is the third way, whereby Christ continues to give these gifts unto men.

Fourthly, The fourth way is, by his law, ordinance, and institution, that the person so qualified, and so called, should be solemnly 'set apart by fasting and prayer.' So you have it, Acts xiv. 23. 'And when they had ordained them elders,' chose them elders 'in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord.' And upon the

like occasion, when Paul and Barnabas were to be separated anew unto a special work, it is said, Acts xiii. 3. 'When they had fasted and prayed, they sent them forth.'

These then are the four ways to answer that great inquiry, how doth Christ continue to give ministers unto the church? He doth it by his law, constituting the office, the law in the gospel, which is an everlasting ordinance. He doth it by his Spirit, communicating gifts unto persons. He doth it by his church calling of them, and by a submission to them according to the will of God, and testifying that submission by their suffrage. He doth it by his ordinance of solemnly setting them apart with fasting and prayer. And these, my brethren, are things that we are come together about this day. This is our faith, this is our warrant; wherein we do not pursue our own imaginations, nor the inventions of other men, nor follow cunningly devised fables; but from first to last have our warrant from Christ. The good Lord pardon us, wherein we come short of the preparation of the sanctuary, and accept us according to the desire of our hearts, to do the service of his house and tabernacle.

I will but speak a word or two of use to this part, and then we will proceed to that work which is your part this day; whereunto, if God give strength, I shall add some farther instructions, and then desire the help of our brethren present to carry it on.

First then, if there be any office, let it be under never so glorious, or so specious a title, if Christ hath not appointed that office by virtue of gospel ordinance and institution, there is a nullity in it; it is no gift of Christ, let who will bear it, and discharge it; with what formality soever they come unto it, popes and cardinals, metropolitans and diocesans, there is a nullity in the office, by reason there is no law, ordinance, or institution of Christ appointing of it. All the outward order and solemnity in the world, and all the holiness of persons, when engaging in such an office, cannot give it a right and title; because it wants the law of Christ for its foundation.

And where the office itself is appointed by Christ, if there be no communication of gifts unto the person; there is not a nullity in the office, absolutely; but there is a nullity as to the person. It is essential to the office, that Christ choose

the person by communicating of gifts unto him. Where this is not, I will not say, that there must always (for things are greatly varied with circumstances) be a nullity in all administrations; but there is a nullity in the person ministering before Christ.

Secondly, Let the church consider aright, how they are to receive, and what apprehensions they have of a minister that comes to them according to this law, order, and institution of Christ, which I have unfolded to you. He is a gift of Christ. It requires wisdom and prudence in a man to receive a gift: consider what he doth, he takes an obligation upon himself; much more to receive a gift from a prince. But to receive a gift, and so great a gift from Christ! Certainly there ought to be some particular preparation of our hearts for it. How great a mercy, how great a gift this is, I could easily demonstrate.

There are two things that I will but name, 1. Valuation and thankfulness. 2. Improvement. As soon as we are a church of God, these things are expected of us. When we receive so great a gift from Christ, he expects that it be valued, that it be thankfully received, and that it be duly improved.

And on the part of him, or of any of us, who are called to the ministry, undoubtedly it is incumbent upon us, so to behave ourselves, and so to approve ourselves, as that we may own ourselves to be a gift of Christ unto the church, and be owned by the church, as a gift of Christ. I do not know, for my own part, a more trembling thought that a minister hath, or can have in the consideration of his office, work, and duty, whereunto he is called, than this one; How shall I approve myself so, as to be looked on as a gift from Christ, given unto the church?

There are three things that are required in every one, who may be esteemed to be a gift given by Christ unto the church. 1. An imitation of Christ. 2. A representation of him. And, 3. Zeal for him.

1. 'An imitation of Christ,' as the great Shepherd of the flock, in meekness, in care, in love, in tenderness towards the whole flock. So Christ is described, Isa. xl. 11. 'He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and shall

gently lead those who are with young:’ here is the great pattern, here is an example for all who are shepherds of the flock under Christ (who intend to give an account with comfort unto the great Shepherd of the sheep, when he shall appear at the last day) in meekness and condescension, giving out help and assistance, bearing with all things, that cannot particularly be insisted upon; and especially conforming unto him, who knows how to have compassion on the ignorant, and them that are out of the way.

2. There is required, ‘a representation of Christ;’ and that in all his offices. (1.) A representation of him in the rule and conduct of the church. That the church under our rule and conduct, may be sensible that the government of Christ is spiritual and holy. What a woful representation of Christ is made by men, who undertake to rule the church of God, with rods and axes, with fire and fagot? Is this to represent the meek and holy King of the church, or rather, a devouring tyrant, unto the world? It is our great work in what interest Christ hath given us in the rule of the church, to represent him, as spiritual, as holy, as meek, as universally tending to edification, and not to destruction. (2.) To represent Christ in his prophetic office. He was the great teacher of the church; and the principal work of ministers is, ‘to preach the Word in season and out of season,’ by all means to carry on the church in the knowledge of God, and of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I will give them ‘pastors that shall feed them with knowledge and understanding.’ Those who take upon themselves to be pastors, and neglect this work of feeding the flock, may, at as cheap a rate, and with equal modesty, renounce Jesus Christ.

(3.) Christ is to be represented in the imitable part of his sacerdotal office, which is to make continual prayers and intercession for the church, and that church in particular whereunto we belong. So the apostle speaks, Col. iv. 12. ‘Epaphras, who is one of you (i. e. he was one of their elders and teachers), a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.’ It is a great work thus, in all these things, to represent Christ in all his offices unto the church. And indeed, who is sufficient for these things? I might add,

3. 'Zeal for Christ.' He that comes as an ambassador from Christ, in Christ's stead, will have zeal for all the concerns of Christ in the church; for his worship, for the purity of his ordinances, for the conversion of souls, and for the building up of the saints. This is required of them who are thus a gift from Christ.

This is the first thing that my text doth suggest unto me, namely, that the ministry is the gift of Christ.

And having proceeded so far, I will here stay a little, and desire the church would attend to their work and duty. After which, if God give strength, I will speak somewhat more unto the eminency of this gift, according as it is set out in this text.

[Then the church assented to the election, by the lifting up of their hands; and the Doctor went on.]

I have shewed you, that the ministry and ministers are a gift that Christ himself gave the church. I shall now shew you, which was the second part of my proposition, 'that it is a great and eminent gift,' or an eminent fruit of the exaltation and mediation of Christ.

First, It appears to be so, from the 'great and glorious preparation' that was made for it. When did Christ give this gift? 'When,' saith he, 'he ascendeth up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.' The words are taken out of Psal. lxxviii. 17, 18. 'The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them as in Sinai, in the holy place. Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men.' The words you see in the first place are spoken of God himself, applied by our apostle to Christ, upon these two grounds. 1. Because it was peculiarly the Son of God, who appeared so to the fathers under the Old Testament. It was he who appeared to Abraham, and gave him the promise; and to Moses in the bush: it was he who gave the law at mount Sinai; and appeared to Joshua for the conquest of Canaan, where the church was to be set up: so it was still the same person, though the articles were varied. 2. Because whatever was done in a way of solemnity under the Old Testament, was a representation, or a means of introducing of things that were to be done under the New. How did God lead captivity captive, on the glorious giving

of the law upon mount Sinai? That was the day wherein he made his people free. They had no rule, no order, no polity before that, but were under the relics of that captivity which they underwent in Egypt. God now had conquered Pharaoh, and triumphed gloriously over him in the Red Sea, over him and his host, who had kept the people so long in bondage. He led captivity captive, and brought forth his people into liberty, though it was but an initial liberty; it was a bondage in comparison of what was to ensue; but it was the beginning of liberty to them: and all this was to represent the glorious conquest at the ascension of Christ, expressed, Col. ii. 15. 'And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it, or in himself.' When he spoiled Pharaoh, he triumphed over him gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. It was the same divine person who did that as a type of what he would do, when he should spoil principalities and powers, Satan, death, hell, sin, and all the spiritual adversaries of the church, triumphing over them; then did he lead captivity captive. And therefore you may observe the change of the words, which all do who speak to this thing. In the Psalms, it is said, 'Thou hast ascended on high, and led captivity captive, and received gifts for men.' In my text it is said, 'He ascended on high, and led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.' Though Christ be spoken of as God in the sixty-eighth Psalm, wherein he was incapable of receiving gifts; yet it was in a mystery and prophecy, that he should be in that state and condition wherein he should receive them, and receive them that he might give them; as in Acts ii. 32. 'When he was exalted on the right hand of God, and received the gift of the Spirit,' he then gave it out unto men.

What is all this great preparation now for? What is it the apostle ushers in upon this theatre of glory? Nothing less than the giving of ministers unto the church. He ascended up on high, and led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. What I pray! some to be pastors and teachers. There is a greater glory in giving a minister to a poor congregation, than there is in the instalment and enthroning of all the popes and cardinals, and metropolitans that ever were in the world: let their glory be what it will, Christ is upon

his theatre of glory in the communication of this office, and these officers.

Wherein will you say is this glory? You see no beauty, no comeliness in it: no more did the unbelieving world in the person of Christ, nor ways of Christ. Was there not a great deal of glory in the setting apart of Aaron unto his service, in all his glorious garments and ornaments, with all the solemnity of sacrifices that was used therein? doubtless there was. But, saith our apostle, 'It had no glory in comparison of the ministry of the Spirit. This is a glory that doth excel;' 2 Cor. iii. 10. The reason why we see not the glory of it is, because we are carnal. It is a spiritual glory. God himself presides over the work of this day. 'I will place my tabernacle with them, and I will walk with them, and be their God;' Levit. xx. 13. If we are the church and tabernacle of God, God walks among us this day; Christ is among us by his special presence. 'Where two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them;' Matt. xviii. 20. And much more may his presence be expected in so great a transaction of his authority, as this we are now engaged in. The holy and elect angels are present with us, to give glory to the solemnity. Hence our apostle charges Timothy, 1 Tim. v. 21. 'I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, to observe these things.' Why before the elect angels? because they are present as witnesses in the collation of authority from Christ. Thou hast thousands of witnesses more than thou seest; there are more eyes upon thee than thou takest notice of; God is present, Christ is present, the elect angels are present. These things are the true and faithful sayings of God. Here then is glory and beauty, in that it is not only a gift, but an eminent gift. That is the first thing in my text.

Secondly, It is glorious and eminent from the foundation and spring of it, which is the humiliation and death of Christ. 'Now that he ascended, what is it, but that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth.' Why doth the apostle mention here Christ's descending? Was it to take the advantage of a word? because, having mentioned his ascension, will he mention also his descension? no, that is not the way of the Holy Ghost. There was no reason to

mention it absolutely in this place : it must be with reference to the end, that was under consideration. There is something, saith he, in Christ's descending into the lower part of the earth, that doth contribute to this great gift of the ministry.

The lower part of the earth may have a double interpretation. 1. The earth may be spoken of with reference to the whole world. 2. Some part of the earth may be spoken of with reference to some other part.

If you take it in the first sense, Christ's descending into the lower part of the earth, i. e. into this lower part of the creation, which the earth is ; then it is the incarnation of Christ, and his humiliation, that he intends ; which is so expressed, John iii. 13. ' No man hath ascended up into heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man,' &c. Christ's descending and coming down, was by taking our nature upon him ; so it may be here. He descended into the lower part of the earth, i. e. He came and assumed our nature, and was here in a state of humiliation.

Or, 2. The lower part of the earth intends a comparison between some part of the earth itself ; and so may be taken for the grave ; he descended into the grave. The burial of Christ, which was a great and evident testimony of his real death, is that which is intended ; and so I look upon it in this place. The very descent of Christ into the grave, which is the lowest part of the earth that mankind descend into, is the apostle's meaning.

And observe from hence, that the death of Christ hath a great influence into this gift of the ministry. It is a branch that grew out of the grave of Christ : let it be esteemed as lightly as men please, had not Christ died for it, we had not had a ministry in the world.

And two ways the ministry relates to the death of Christ. 1. Because it was necessary unto his receiving of that power, whereby alone he was able to give ministers. See that at large, Phil. ii. 6—10. ' It was his humbling himself unto the death, even the death of the cross,' that was required to ' that exaltation,' whereby he had power to give ministers. The mediatorial authority of Christ, whereby he was enabled to give ministers to the church, was founded in his death. And, 2. It respects his death, because the very end of the

ministry is, to preach that peace to mankind, which was made by the death of Christ; Eph. ii. 14. 'He is our peace,' he hath made peace for us; and, in ver. 17. 'came and preached peace to those who were afar off, and to those who were nigh.' How did Christ come and preach peace to the Gentiles, to them that were afar off? It was no otherwise than by instituting the office of the ministry, and sending his ministers to preach peace to them. And we that are ministers may know the near relation of our office to the death of Christ, which will greatly direct us in the work we have to do; which is, I say, to preach that peace that was made with God by Christ. This is another thing in the text that sets forth the beauty, glory, and eminency of this great gift of Christ.

S E R M O N IV.*

YOU are a church of ancient standing, and therefore are acquainted both with the duty and practice of it. God hath guided you to call them to office over and among you, who have been long experienced in the work of the ministry; so that I am sure neither they nor you stand in any need of my instruction, as to particular duties. Therefore I shall speak a word in general unto that which is the foundation of all our station, work, and duty, from these words, in

1 Cor. xii. 11.—*But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.*

THERE is this disadvantage in preaching upon a particular occasion, especially for one who hath no more strength than I, that either we must omit insisting on the particular explication of the text, or be prevented in that which we aim at particularly from it. Both cannot be done; therefore I shall only give you the substance of the words, in that proposition which I intend to insist upon; namely,

That it is the work of the Spirit of God in all ages of the church to communicate spiritual gifts, and abilities to those who are called, according unto his mind, to the ministry of the church, to enable them unto all evangelical administrations, to his glory, and the edification of the church.

Had I time, I would inquire into these two things: 1. Whether the Holy Ghost doth indeed continue to communicate spiritual gifts, distinct from natural endowments, and acquired abilities, to the discharge of the work of the ministry, to his glory, and the edification of the church. And, 2. Whether these spiritual gifts and abilities, so communicated, be not the material call to the work of the ministry, antecedently required to the formal call thereunto.

As to the first, It is opposed by them, who say, that these spiritual gifts we talk of, are nothing indeed but men's natural and acquired abilities, with an ordinary blessing of

* This sermon was preached at an ordination, April 3, 1678.

God upon their ministry; and for other spiritual gifts, there are none.

As to the second, It is denied, that there is, or ought to be, an outward way, and order for calling men to the office of the ministry, and that a compliance therewith makes their call good, valuable, and lawful, whether they have of these gifts we talk of or no. And in these two lie all the contests about church order and worship, that we have in the world.

But I shall only speak in the general unto the above proposition, viz. That it is the work of the Holy Spirit, in providing of an able ministry of the New Testament, for the use of the church to the end of the world, to communicate to them who are called according to his mind, spiritual gifts and abilities, to enable them to the discharge of their duty, in the administration of all ordinances, to the glory of Christ, and the edification of the church. The proving of this one proposition, in which is the life of all gospel order, is all I shall do at this time.

And I shall do it in these following observations, principles, and deductions from it.

First, Our Lord Jesus Christ hath faithfully promised, Matt. xxviii. 20. 'that he will be present with his church unto the end of the world.' It is his temple and habitation 'wherein he dwells, and in which he walks.' And this is that which essentially and fundamentally differenceth his church from any other assembly or society of men whatever. Let men cast themselves into what order they please, and let it be the order that they apprehend prescribed unto them in the Scripture; or let them invent a better for themselves, as they think; and let them derive their title to power and authority whence they will; if Christ be not present with them, when they have done, they are 'no gospel church.' They want a foundation; and where there is no foundation, the higher they raise the building, or the more glorious they make the appearance of it, the sooner it will tumble down, and come to nothing. I shall not repeat those promises of Christ's presence now; they are known unto you: and this is the great interest of any church, to secure the promised presence of Christ with them. You have, I hope, under the conduct of the Holy Spirit of God, been guided in your

choice of such persons as are able and faithful to go before you in the work of the Lord: but your design ought to be, that thereby you might receive pledges of the presence of Christ with you, else all other things will be of no value. There are some who are little solicitous about these things. Do but build a house in such a frame, and say certain words, and suppose Christ is immured there; and there is a church built and made. But the observance of all outward rules and orders, according to the gospel, will not constitute a church, unless Christ be taken into it. Moses built a tabernacle according to the mind of God; 'according unto all that God commanded him, so did he;' *Exod. xl. 16.* But when he had framed it exactly, and set it up, and put every thing in its place, it was but an ordinary tabernacle, till the glory of God entered into it. And so it was with Solomon's temple; it was but an ordinary house, until the glory of God entered into it. And suppose we could frame our church societies, according to the rule of the gospel, as Moses framed the tabernacle according to the pattern shewed him in the mount; they would be no churches of Christ, unless the glory of Christ enter into them. Here is our difference and advantage, the glory of God entered into the tabernacle and temple of old, in clouds and darkness, but the glory of God enters into the gospel church, under the New Testament, in light. This is the first head; Christ hath promised to be with his church, to the end and consummation of all things.

Secondly, Christ is thus present with his church, principally and fundamentally by his Spirit. There are three ways of the presence of Christ: 1. He is everywhere essentially present; present with all things by the immensity of his divine nature: Christ did not promise this, for it is not a subject for a promise. The promises are of what may be, and not of what cannot but be. This presence is necessary, and cannot be otherwise; neither doth it make any alteration. It doth not make a church; it doth not make one place heaven, another hell; I speak of the immense presence of the divine nature. Again, 2. Christ is, or may be present in his human nature: this was that which brought a great entanglement on the spirits of his disciples. He told them, he would never leave them; and 'where but two

or three of them were assembled in his name, he would be among them;' Matt. xviii. 20. At length he comes, and tells them, 'it is expedient for you that I go away;' John xvi. 7. This filled their hearts with trouble; they knew not how to reconcile these things. Afterward they were told that he was so gone from them, as that they must not look for him, till the day of judgment; Acts iii. 21. There must be therefore some other presence of Christ besides the essential presence of his divine nature, and besides the presence of his human nature; how else shall the promise be accomplished? saith Christ, I will tell you what that presence is, 'I will send you the Holy Ghost,' to supply the presence of my human nature. It is the substance of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth chapters of John, to declare this. 'I will send you the Comforter to abide with you,' to enable you to all church work. Therefore though I am with you, and have instructed you, yet you can perform no church work at all until the Holy Ghost comes; 'Abide at Jerusalem till you have the promise of the Spirit.' After the ascension of Christ, the apostles went about no church work, till they had received the Holy Ghost. And Christ hath no vicar, but the Spirit. The truth is, the world grew weary of him, and took the work out of his hands, for which he was promised; and he would have nothing to do in that which they call the church. I need not prove this; it hath been the faith of the Catholic church, from the first foundation of it, that the promised presence of Christ with his church was by his Spirit. Some begin to say in our days, that Christ is no otherwise present than by the outward ordinances of it, his word and sacraments. I grant he is present with them, as pledges of his presence, and instruments wherewith, by his Spirit, he doth effectually work. But to make them the whole presence of Christ with us, I do not know what better church state we have than the Jews, when they had the law of old.

Thirdly, This presence of the Spirit is promised, and given unto the church by 'an everlasting covenant;' Isa. lix. 21. 'As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord, My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of

thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever.' To whom is this promise made? It is made unto the gospel church. In the verse foregoing, 'The Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord: as for me, this is my covenant with them.' With whom? With them the Redeemer comes to in Zion, to redeem from iniquity. What is God's covenant with them? It is his word; 'his word shall be in them.' Suppose this promise to cease, and God doth not continue his word to any people; will not their church state cease, which is built upon the doctrine of the prophets and apostles, which is the word of God? Yes, take away the foundation, the state must fall. God's covenant is broken with a people, where he doth not continue his word. But how is it with the 'Spirit of God?' He is also promised in the same covenant: now, suppose there be not a continuance of this promise, then I say, all covenant relation between God and a people, must be dissolved. 'For this is my covenant,' saith the Lord, &c. q. d. If I maintain a covenant with a people, I will give them my Spirit to abide with them for ever. That covenant whereby you are joined, is dependent on this great promise; and if this be not made good, your church state comes to an end, notwithstanding whatever outward order there may be among you: but he hath given his church a covenant which 'shall abide for ever.'

Fourthly, It is from hence, that the ministry of the gospel is 'the ministry of the Spirit;' 2 Cor. iii. 6—8. 'Who hath also made us able ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter, but of the Spirit.' There were never but two ministrations, or two ministries in the world, that were accepted of God, the one was the ministration 'of the letter, and of death;' the other was, and is the ministration 'of the Spirit and of life;' and they were both glorious ministrations. That of the letter and death, was glorious from its institution. You know what a glorious institution it had at mount Sinai, from the manner of its performance, in a glorious sanctuary, or tabernacle, and temple: and from its signification, it was glorious. 'But the ministration of the Spirit, is much more glorious.' There never were but these two ministrations. If there be a ministration that is not a

ministration of the letter and of death, nor a ministration of the Spirit and of life, it is antichrist's. Now the first it cannot be; the ministration of the letter and of death, is the ministration of the law; and the ministration of the gospel, is the ministration of the Spirit. But say some, it is so, because the Spirit of God hath revealed all gospel dispensations; without which, it had not been within the compass of the reason of man to have found them out. But in answer to this, the Spirit of God revealed all the ordinances and ministrations of old, from first to last, even the little additions that David made after Moses's time. 1 Chron. xxviii. 12. 19. 'All these things did the hand of God teach me by the Spirit.' So that if it be the ministration of the Spirit, because the Spirit revealed them, so was the law the ministration of the Spirit, because the Spirit revealed that. The ministration of the Spirit must signify, either that the Spirit is the efficient of the ministration, or the effect of it. If the Spirit be the efficient of the ministration, then it is the Holy Spirit of God, giving spiritual gifts and abilities to the ministers of the gospel, to enable them to administer all gospel ordinances to the glory of Christ, and the edification of the church. Or the ministration of the Spirit may signify the communication of him, and so be the effect of the ministration. Gal. iii. 2. 'Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?' i. e. Received ye the Spirit by the law, or by the gospel? Then this follows, that so long as there is the preaching of the gospel, there is the communication of the Spirit: take it which way you will, it is sufficient for my end. If you take the Spirit to be the efficient of the ministration of the church, enabling its ministers to perform their work, or for the effect of the ministration, he is to abide with the church for ever. For the clearing of this, which is the hinge on which all gospel order turns, we have gone thus far, that Christ hath promised the Spirit to be with the church: that it is neither the essential presence of his divine or human nature in particular, and that the Spirit is promised to be with the church, by an everlasting and unchangeable covenant; from whence it is, the gospel is the ministration of the spirit, and of life, and not of death.

Fifthly, Let us consider the general end, why the Spirit

is thus promised unto the church. God hath promised unto Jesus Christ, that he shall have a kingdom and church in the world, while the sun and moon endureth; Psal. lxxii. 17. 'His name shall endure for ever. His name shall be continued as long as the sun,' i. e. To the end of the world. Isa. ix. 7. it is said, 'of the increase of his government, or church, there shall be no end;' he shall order it for ever. Matt. xvi. 18. 'I will build my church upon this rock,' i. e. upon himself, 'and the gates of hell shall never prevail against it.' Now this promise doth Christ require, that we should mix with faith, which we cannot do, unless there be some ground for the infallible accomplishment of it. Whereon then doth depend the certain accomplishment of this great promise, that God hath made unto Jesus Christ? concerning which, we have as much reason to have our faith exercised at this day, as ever. It must depend on some work of God, or man. Suppose it depends on some work of man, i. e. upon the steadiness of the will of man, in yielding obedience unto Jesus Christ, and so continuing his church and kingdom in the world: leaving the ordering of the things of the church, according to God's institution of it, and maintain withal, that God doth not by effectual grace determine the will of man to obedience, and then God himself can only conjecture. Nor does this lay any ground for us to mix it with faith; but rather faith will depend on men's doing their duty in the world, which indeed can be no real ground of faith: for what happens in one place, in the same circumstances of things, may fall out in another: and we know some places where the gospel hath been embraced, and afterward hath come to nothing. Therefore, certainly, the accomplishment of this promise must depend upon the work of God. If you ask, What work of God that is, whereon the certainty of this promise doth depend? I say, it is this work, and no other, of sending the Holy Spirit.

There are but two things to be considered therein; its internal form, and its external form. Its internal form is union to Jesus Christ by saving grace; its external form and constitution is according to the law of the gospel, and its power. And this cannot be continued without the continued ministration of the Spirit of God, in and with his church.

To suppose the internal form, that we may have union with Christ, or saving grace without the effectual work of the Spirit, is at once to blot out all. Therefore, if God should cease to communicate the Spirit, as to an internal saving work upon the hearts of the elect, the church would cease, as to its internal form. No church would have a relation unto Jesus Christ as the mystical head, if God should cease to communicate the Spirit as to gifts. For the outward administration and form of the church, whatever order you bring into it, cannot be accounted a church of Christ, unless there be the presence of Christ in it. And no man can make confession, 'that Jesus Christ is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost;' 1 Cor. xii. 3. You can make no profession, continue no dispensation of ordinances, or any thing that is acceptable unto God, without the Holy Ghost. The sum of all you do this day is, your acknowledging Jesus Christ to be the Lord, that you are in subjection unto his authority, that you are in the observation of his appointments, and that you recommend your consciences unto him who is 'your Lord and your God;' but you must have the Spirit of God, and his presence, in order to this. The Holy Ghost is promised and given for the continuance and preservation of a church here below, and therein of the accomplishment of this promise, which God hath made to us, to continue with the church to the end of all things. And if he should cease, as to either of his operations, either in working internal saving grace, or spiritual abilities for gospel administrations, the church must cease both in the internal and external form and power of it.

Having laid this foundation, I come in the next place,

Sixthly, To some particular proof of the proposition; namely, That the Holy Ghost thus promised, thus sent, thus given, doth furnish the ministers of the gospel, according to his mind, with spiritual abilities in the discharge of their work; and without it, they are no way fitted for, nor able to it; no way accepted with Christ in what they do, nor can give any faithful account of what they undertake. It is that which the Lord Jesus Christ intends to declare unto us, Matt. xxv. 14—30. You have an account there given of the continuance of the church, the kingdom of Christ in the world, to the end of it. The great Lord is gone away, and

intends to return again at the end of the world ; in the mean time, he hath appointed servants to take care of the administration of the affairs of his house and kingdom : and for this end, he gives them talents that they may trade with. He gives them variously as he pleases ; ‘ to one, five ; to another, two ; and to another, but one :’ and he provides work for all their talents. Some men have grown so rich in the world, that they care not to employ their stock ; but it must not be so with us. We shall have trade for all our talents. None have so little but they may trade. He that had but one might have traded, as well as he that had five, and been as well accepted. It is agreed by all, that they are spiritual abilities that Christ gives his servants to trade with in the administration of gospel ordinances. And these three things are plainly held forth in the parable. 1. That wherever Jesus Christ calls and appoints a minister in his house, for the building work of it, he gives him spiritual abilities to do that work by the Holy Ghost. He set none at work in his house, when he went away, but he gave them talents. 2. For men to take upon them to serve Christ as officers in the work of his house, who have received none of these spiritual abilities to work with, is a high presumption, and casts reflection of dishonour on Jesus Christ, as if he called to work, and gave no strength ; as though he called to trade, and gave no stock ; or required spiritual duties, and gave no spiritual abilities. Christ will say to such at the last day, ‘ How came ye in hither ?’ 3. This is plain in the parable also, that those who have received talents, or spiritual gifts and abilities of the Holy Ghost, they are to trade with them. And I do not know a warning, that I judge more necessary to be given those who are called this day, than to charge them not to trade too much with their natural gifts, and abilities, and learning. These are talents in their kind ; but it is the Spirit must manage all that learning they have, or it will prejudice them, and you also. I have known some good men have been so addicted to their study, that they have thought the last day of the week sufficient to prepare for their ministry, though they employ all the rest of the week in other studies. But your great business is to trade with your spiritual abilities.

There is another testimony given to this (to name one

or two among many), in Rom. xii. 4—8. ‘For as we have many members in one body, and all the members have not the same office; so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts, differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation,’ &c. It is not to my present concern, whether offices or duties are intended in this place; but three things are plain to me in this text. 1. That this discourse and direction doth concern the ordinary state of the church in all ages. I profess to you, I had rather a thousand times be of their opinion, as bad as it is, who say, that all church state is ceased, than that there may be a church state, when these gifts and graces are not. If I did not see these graces and gifts continued to some, to keep up the ordinances of the church in some measure, I should believe it had ceased. 2. That gifts are the foundation of all church work, whether it be in office or out of office. ‘Having therefore gifts, let us,’ saith the apostle, do so and so. If there be no spiritual gifts, there is no spiritual work. Spiritual gifts are the foundation of office, which is the foundation of work in the church, and of all gospel administrations in a special manner, according to the gifts received. Truly, it may be, you may think it lost labour to prove this; but there is nothing more despised or reproached in this world, than this one apprehension, that there are spiritual gifts given unto persons, to enable them to perform all gospel administrations. 3. That not only the discharge of duty and work depends on the administration of gifts, but the measure of work depends upon the measure of gifts; it is according to the measure every one hath received: and there are many measures. As long as there is any measure of spiritual gifts, let it not be despised among you. The gifts of the Holy Ghost are not only for work, but, I say, for the measure of work; Eph. iv. 8—13. All these spiritual gifts the Holy Ghost doth bestow, to enable persons to perform their work.

Seventhly, As spiritual gifts are bestowed unto this end, so they are necessary for it. There can be no gospel administration without spiritual gifts; the ministration of the

gospel being the ministration of the Spirit; and all gospel ministrations are spiritual ministrations. The truth is, one reason why they are called so, and are so, is, because they are no way to be administered to the glory of Christ, but by the aid and help of these spiritual gifts. If the Lord Jesus Christ hath appointed carnal ordinances, such as are suited to the reason and strength of a man, there had been no need for him to promise the assistance of the Spirit. 'The spirit of a man knows the things of a man;' 1 Cor. ii. 11. All the things within the compass of a man, the spirit of a man will find them out, and give strength for the performance of them. Saith Christ, John vi. 63. 'My words, they are Spirit,' and all my offices and ordinances are spiritual; and thus there is a necessity of spiritual gifts for their administration: so that spiritual gifts and spiritual administrations live and die together. And the way whereby the world lost the spiritual ministrations of the gospel, was by the neglect and contempt of spiritual gifts, whereby alone they can be performed. This was the ground of the apostacy of the primitive church; they grew weary of spiritual ministrations. It is the most difficult and laborious ministry. Men's hearts waxing carnal, they grew weary of spiritual things; they did not care to wait upon Christ for supplies of grace, and the gifts of the Spirit; for these gifts are not grace, and in truth will flourish long in no other soil but where there is grace. As we should not have such a product of sin, were it not for original corruption, whence it grows, so flourishing gifts will not long grow, but in the soil of the Spirit. How many persons with gifts have flourished for a while, and then have withered; because they were planted in no good soil. It will be drudgery for any man to keep up spiritual gifts, where they have not a spiritual soil to grow in. The world grew weary of gospel ministrations, and would not keep up that way. What then? They found out imaginations suited to their inclinations; they will have prayer-books to read, ceremonies to perform, and a number of inventions, to keep up a form of worship, without those spiritual gifts. We have an instance in the church of Rome, what various extravagant things they have done to make an outward show, when they had lost spiritual gifts. All forms of worship are nothing but to keep an outward appearance. They did not like to retain

these gifts in their minds, whereby alone spiritual worship is to be administered. The principle of the apostacy of all churches in the world is from a weariness of serving God by the aid and assistance of the Spirit.

Eighthly, That there is a communication of spiritual gifts in all gospel ordinances, we plead experience. We know how this is derided by profane scoffers : but we plead the experience of those, who are humble and holy, and have a spiritual acquaintance with these things. I hope I may plead against the world, the experience of this congregation. Have you had no experience of those ministrations ? Have you never found in the administrations of those whom God hath called to go before you, evidences of the presence of Christ by his Spirit in the communication of gifts to them, to make them effectual to your edification and consolation ? Have you not had ‘ a proof of the Spirit of Christ speaking in them ? ’ 2 Cor. xiii. 3.

It is intolerable presumption for men to think of carrying on gospel administrations without the supplies of the Spirit, as you, who are God’s people, can testify. And there is no congregation of Christ, but can bear testimony to it, that ‘ the Spirit divides to every man as he will ; ’ gives out, as he pleases, of his assistance. Let men therefore pretend never so much, that they are able to be ministers of the New Testament without any of those aids and assistances, whereof we have been discoursing ; let them please themselves with the applause they may receive from persons unacquainted with the mystery and glory of these things ; let them despise and condemn whatever is testified to the contrary ; it is certain, where the gifts of the Spirit of God, as to the gospel ministrations of the church, are lost or neglected, Christ is so also, the Spirit of God is so also, and all the benefits of the gospel will be so too.

I have but one word to add, and that is of exhortation, unto those whom Christ hath called unto the work of the ministry, and whom you have called this day. I told you, at the beginning, I would not give them instruction, but I may give them a word of exhortation ; and that is, to attend unto the ministry whereunto God hath called them, upon this foundation. And there are three motives I shall give them unto the work.

First, It is the most difficult ministration of any that a person can be called unto; as it is great, so it is difficult. Any way of administration is easy in comparison of this of spiritual gifts; easy to flesh and blood. What an easy ministration, with all their altars and services, hath the church of Rome provided for their ministers? so to read, and so to sing, come as they will, prepared or not prepared, having hearts and minds filled with what they will; this is a ministry for them easier than any trade, and in this, their natural endowments and abilities are employed. But if we intend the ministers by the gifts received from the Holy Ghost, the matter and root wherein alone they will grow must be carefully preserved. If grace decays in our hearts, a ministry in gifts will grow burdensome and displeasing to ourselves, as well as useless to the congregation. We must look well unto the soil, or it will be of no advantage that we have this ministry committed to us. It is required there be no unuseful ministers. Hand and heart must be always filled with the work; 'Meditate on these things;' 1 Tim. iv. 15. If you have undertaken the work of the ministry, you must be meditating on it. Unless you are in these things continually, you will not make faithful dispensers of the word. A man may preach a very good sermon, who is otherwise himself; but he will never make a good minister of Jesus Christ, whose heart and mind is not always in the work. Spiritual gifts will require continual ruminating on the things of the gospel in our minds, which makes it a difficult ministry; that our hearts and minds may be cast into the mould and form of these things, which we are to deliver to others. And it is surprising, how a little necessary diversion will unfit the mind for this work.

Secondly, As it is a very difficult work to carry on to a right improvement of it, so it is a glorious work; let the world deride it as they will. The great design of the apostle in 2 Cor. iii. is to shew, it is much more glorious than the old ministration was. Really, that was a very glorious ministration. But this ministry that is committed to us hath more glory in it, being 'the ministration of the Spirit,' whereby souls are converted by the power of grace, and holy converse with God kept up. It is much more glorious than beholding the high-priest in Solomon's temple being

under the eye of the Holy God, who is Judge of these ministerial gifts; therefore do not divert from them by any means.

Thirdly, It is the only ministry that is indeed effectual unto the edification and building up of the church; Eph. iv. 8, &c. This is the great end for which gospel ministers are appointed, 'till all are brought,' by their ministry, 'to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.' The Lord prosper it in your hands.

Give me leave to speak one word unto you that are the church. Know what you are to do, in reference unto those you have called, and made officers this day. Pray unto God for a fresh communication of gifts unto them; they are capable of it. It is a renewed act of grace, that prepares and opens the soul for receiving new communications of God's grace, for the administration of the holy things of Christ in the congregation. Pray much for them to that end and purpose.

S E R M O N V.*

And I will give you pastors according to my heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.—Jer. iii. 15.

ALL the names of the officers of the church under the New Testament have a double signification, a general and more large signification, and a special signification. As for instance, *διάκονος*, a ‘deacon,’ hath a general signification; it signifies any minister or servant: and it hath a special signification, when it denotes that peculiar officer, which was instituted in the church, to take care of the poor. And so the name of a pastor hath a more general, and a more special signification. In general, it signifies any teacher or officer in the church, ordinary or extraordinary; in special, it signifies that peculiar officer in the church, which, as such, is distinguished from a teacher. ‘He gave some to be pastors and teachers;’ Eph. iv. 11. For there is a distinction between pastor and teacher, not as to degree, but as to order. I do not use the distinction in the sense of those who make bishops and presbyters differ in degree, but not in order; but it is a distinction as to that beautiful order, which Christ hath instituted in his church. Christ hath instituted a beautiful order in his church, if it were discovered and improved. And I have wished sometimes, I could live to see it; but I do not think I shall. Yet this I would recommend to my brethren, as the way to discover the order of Christ in the church; and there is no way to discover it, but by the harmony that there is between gifts, office, and edification. The original of all church order and rule is in gifts; the exercise of those gifts is by office; the end of all those gifts and offices is edification.

Now, I believe, I can demonstrate, that all ordinary spiritual gifts, that Christ hath given to his church, are reducible to four heads, and all of them are for the exercise of

* This sermon was preached at an ordination, Sept. 8, 1682.

these gifts; for they must all be exercised distinctly. Herein you will find out the beautiful order of Christ in the church, and not else. I say, all gifts may be reduced to four heads. The one head of these gifts is to be exercised by the pastor; one head by the teacher; one by the ruler; and one by the deacon: and all these gifts, exercised by all these officers, answer all ends for the edification of the church. For it is a vain opinion, that the rule and conduct of Christ's church is either in one, or in all. There is nothing in what I have declared, but what is the design of the apostle in Rom. xii. 6—8. Let us study that harmony more, and we shall find more of the beauty and glory of it.

I shall speak of these pastors mentioned here in the text; and I shall speak of them in general, as all teaching officers in the church, which is the general signification of the word. And all that I shall speak of them is, to remind myself, and my brethren, and you, of somewhat of the duty of such a pastor; what is incumbent on him; what is expected from him. Now I do not design to go through all the necessary duties of a pastor or teacher; I only design to give some instances.

First, The duty of such an officer of the church,* a pastor, teacher, elder of the church, is that mentioned in the text, 'to feed the church with knowledge and understanding.' This feeding is by preaching of the gospel. He is no pastor, who doth not feed his flock. It belongs essentially to the office; and that not now and then (according to the figure and image that is set up of the ministry in the world, a dead idol) as occasion serves. But the apostle saith, Acts vi. 4. 'We will give ourselves continually to the word. It is to labour in the word and doctrine;' 1 Tim. v. 17. to make all things subservient to this work of preaching and instructing the church; to do it in that frame the apostle mentions, in Col. i. 28. he speaks of his preaching, and the design of his preaching, 'whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.' How doth he do it? 'Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which work-

* It is proper to inform the reader, that several things in this sermon are to be found in Dr. Owen's 'True Nature of a Gospel Church,' chap. v.

eth in me mightily.' There is not one word in our translation, that answers the emphasis of the original words; 'Whereunto I labour,' Εἰς ὃ καὶ κοπιῶ. Κοπιῶ is to labour with diligence and intention, with weariness and industry. I labour, 'usque ad fatigationem,' to the spending of myself. Striving, ἀγωνιζόμενος; striving as a man that runs in a race; or striving as a man that wrestles for victory; as men did in their public contests. And how? κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν αὐτοῦ, according to the effectual, in-working, or inward operation of him, ἐνεργουμένην ἐν ἐμοὶ, who does effectually work in me. We cannot reach the emphasis by any words in our language. And how is all this? ἐν δυνάμει, with mighty power. Here is the frame of the apostle's spirit: it should give dread to us in the consideration of it. I labour diligently, I strive as in a race, I wrestle for victory, by the mighty in-working power of Christ working in me, and that with great and exceeding power.

What I shall do is, to shew you, in some instances, what is required unto this work of teaching, or of feeding the congregation with knowledge and understanding, in this duty of preaching the word.

1. There is spiritual wisdom in understanding the mysteries of the gospel, that we may be able to declare the whole counsel of God, and the riches and treasures of the grace of Christ unto the souls of men. See Acts xx. 27. 1 Cor. ii. 1—4. Eph. iii. 7—9. Many, in the church of God, were, in those days of light, growing and thriving; they had a great insight into spiritual things, and into the mysteries of the gospel. The apostle prays, that they might all have it; Eph. i. 17, 18. 'That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, might give unto you the spirit of wisdom, and revelation in the knowledge of him. The eyes of your understanding being enlightened: that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.'

Really, it is no easy thing for ministers to instruct to such kind of duties. If there be not some degree of eminency in themselves, how shall we lead on such persons as these to perfection? We must labour ourselves to have a thorough knowledge of these mysteries, or we shall be use-

less to a great part of the church. There is spiritual wisdom and understanding in the mysteries of the gospel required hereunto.

2. Authority is required. What is authority in a preaching ministry? It is a consequent of unction, and not of office. The scribes had an outward call to teach in the church, but they had no unction, no anointing, that could evidence they had the Holy Ghost in his gifts and graces. Christ had no outward call, but he had an unction; he had a full unction of the Holy Ghost in his gifts and graces for the preaching of the gospel. Hereon there was a controversy about his authority. The scribes say unto him, Mark xi. 28. 'By what authority dost thou these things? And who gave thee this authority?' The Holy Ghost determines the matter. Matt. vii. 29. 'He preached as one having authority, and not as the scribes.' They had authority of office, but not of unction; Christ only had that. And preaching in the demonstration of the Spirit, which men quarrel so much about, is nothing less than the evidence, in preaching, of unction, in the communication of gifts and grace unto them for the discharge of their office: for it is a vain thing for men to assume and personate authority. So much evidence as they have of unction from God in gifts and grace, so much authority they have, and no more in preaching: and let every one then keep within his bounds.

3. Another thing required hereunto, is experience of the power of the things we preach to others. I think truly, that no man preaches that sermon well to others, that doth not first preach it to his own heart. He who doth not feed on, and digest, and thrive by what he prepares for his people, he may give them poison as far as he knows; for, unless he finds the power of it in his own heart, he cannot have any ground of confidence, that it will have power in the hearts of others. It is an easier thing to bring our heads to preach, than our hearts to preach. To bring our heads to preach, is but to fill our minds and memories with some notions of truth of our own or other men, and speak them out to give satisfaction to ourselves and others: this is very easy. But to bring our hearts to preach, is to be transformed into the power of these truths; or to find the power of them both before, in fashioning our minds and hearts,

and in delivering of them, that we may have benefit ; and to be acted with zeal for God, and compassion to the souls of men. A man may preach every day in the week, and not have his heart engaged once. This hath lost us powerful preaching in the world, and set up, instead of it, quaint orations ; for such men never seek after experience in their own hearts : and so it is come to pass, that some men's preaching, and some men's not preaching, have lost us the power of what we call the ministry : that, though there be twenty or thirty thousand in orders, yet the nation perishes for want of knowledge, and is overwhelmed in all manner of sins, and not delivered from them unto this day.

4. Skill to divide the word aright. This skill to divide the word aright, is practical wisdom, in considering the word of God, to take out not only that which is substantial food for the souls of men, but what is meet food for them to whom we preach : and that,

5. Requires the knowledge and consideration of the state of our flocks. He who hath not the state of his flock continually in his eye, and in his mind in his work of preaching, fights uncertainly, as a man beating the air. If he doth not consider what is the state of his flock, with reference to temptations, in reference to their light, or to their darkness, to their growth or to their decays, to their flourishing or to their withering, to the measure of their knowledge and attainments ; he who doth not duly consider these things, never preaches aright unto them.

6. There is required too, that we be acted by zeal for the glory of God, and compassion to the souls of men.

Having spoken these few plain words, I may say, ' Who is sufficient for these things ? ' There is required, that spiritual wisdom which is necessary to understand the mysteries of the gospel, able to instruct and lead on to perfection the most grown in our congregation ; that authority, which proceeds from unction, and is an evidence of an anointing with the graces and gifts of the Spirit, which alone gives authority in preaching ; that experience which conforms our whole souls into every sermon we preach, so as to feel the truth in the power of it ; that skill whereby to divide the word aright, &c. Hence we see we have great need to pray for ourselves, and that you should pray for us. Pray for

your ministers. This then is the first duty required of gospel ministers.

Secondly, Another duty required is, continual prayer for the churches over which Christ hath made them overseers. I have not time to confirm these things by particular testimonies: you know how often the apostle expresses it of himself, and enjoins it unto others, continually to pray for the flock.

I will name four reasons why we ought to do so, and four things we ought to pray for.

1. My first reason is, because I believe that no man can have any evidence in his own soul, that he doth conscientiously perform any ministerial duty towards his flock, who doth not continually pray for them. Let him preach as much as he will, visit as much as he will, speak as much as he will, unless God doth keep up in him a spirit of prayer in his closet and family for them, he can have no evidence that he doth perform any other ministerial duty in a due manner, or that what he doth is accepted with God. I speak to them who are wise, and understand these things.

2. This is the way whereby we may bless our congregations.

Authoritative blessing, as far as I know, is taken from us. There is only that which is euctical and declarative, left to us. Pronouncing the blessing is only euctical and declarative, and not authoritative. Now there is no way whereby we can bless our flock by institution, but by a continual praying for a blessing upon them.

3. If men are but as they used to be, I do not believe any minister, any pastor in the world, can keep up a due love to his church, who doth not pray for them. He will meet with so many provocations, imprudences, and miscarriages, that nothing can keep up his heart with inflamed love towards them, but by praying for them continually. That will conquer all prejudices, if he continues so doing. And,

4. My last reason is this, In our prayers for our people, God will teach us what we shall preach unto them. We cannot pray for them, but we must think on what it is we pray for, and that is the consideration of their condition; and therein God teaches the ministers of the gospel. If it be so with them, this is that they should teach them. The

more we pray for our people, the better shall we be instructed what to preach to them. The apostles, to take us off from all other occasions, 'gave themselves to prayer and the word;' Acts. vi. 4. Prayer is in the first place. It is not personal, but ministerial prayer for the church, and the progress of the gospel.

What shall we pray for?

1. For the success of the word that we preach unto them. This falls in with the light of nature. We are to pray for the success of the word unto all the ends of it; and that is for all the ends of living unto God, for direction to duty, for instruction in the truth, for growth in grace, for all things whereby we may come to the enjoyment of God. We should pray, that all these ends may be accomplished in our congregations, in the dispensation of the word, or else we sow seed at random, which will not succeed merely by our sowing; for let the husbandman break up the fallow ground and harrow it, and cast in the seed, unless showers come, he will have no crop; in like manner, after we have cast the seed of the gospel, though the hearts of men are prepared in some measure, unless there come the showers of the Spirit upon them, there will be no profiting. Therefore let us pray, that a blessing might be upon the word. The ministers of the word preach, and would be accepted with the people; take this 'arcanum' of it, pray over it, and it is the only way to have it accepted in the hearts of the people: Follow it on with prayer.

2. We are to pray for the presence of Christ in all our assemblies; for this is that whereon depends all the efficacy of the ordinances of the gospel. Christ hath given us many promises of it, and we are to act in faith concerning it, and to pray in faith for it in our assemblies, which is a great ministerial duty; and if we do it not, we are ignorant of our duty, and are willing to labour in the fire, where all must perish; we fight at hazard, for all the efficacy of the ordinances of preaching, and praying, doth not depend upon any thing in ourselves, of our gifts, notions, parts, fervency, but it depends only upon the presence of Christ. Make this your business to pray mightily for it in the congregation, to make all these effectual.

3. Our prayers should be with respect unto the state

and condition of the church. It is supposed, he that is a minister is satisfied he hath some measure of understanding and knowledge in the mysteries of the gospel, that he is able to conduct the best of the congregation unto salvation; that he knows their measure, their weakness, and their temptations; that he knows the times and seasons in which they are exercised and exposed, whether times of adversity or prosperity; and, as far as possible, knows how it is with their persons. And we ought to suit our prayers according to all we know concerning them, and be satisfied in it, that Christ himself will come in to recover them who are fallen, to establish them who stand, to heal them who do backslide, to strengthen them who are tempted, to encourage them who are running and pressing forward to perfection, to relieve them who are disconsolate and in the dark: and we have of all these sorts in our churches. And our prayers should be for a communication of supplies unto them, continually in all these cases.

Thirdly, It is incumbent on men who are pastors and teachers of churches, to preserve the truth and doctrine of the gospel, that is committed to the church, to keep it entire, and defend it against all opposition. See the weighty words wherewith the apostle gives this in charge unto Timothy, 1 Tim. vi. 20. ‘O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust.’ And, 2 Tim. i. 14. ‘That good thing,’ *τὴν καλὴν παρακαταθήκην*, ‘that good depositum,’ that good treasure, ‘that is committed to thee, keep by the Holy Ghost, which dwelleth in us.’ This charge is given to all of us who are ministers, keep the truth, that good, that blessed thing. ‘It is,’ saith the apostle, ‘the glorious gospel of the blessed God, that is committed to my trust;’ 1 Tim. i. 11. And it is committed to all our trust; and we are to keep it against all opposition. The church is the ground and pillar of truth, to hold up, and declare the truth in and by its ministers. But is that all? No; ‘The church is like the tower of David made for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men;’ Cant. iv. 4. The ministers of the gospel are shields and bucklers to defend the truth against all adversaries and opposers. The church hath had thousands of bucklers and shields of mighty men, or else the truth had been lost. They are not only to declare it in

the preaching of the gospel; but to defend and preserve it against all opposition; to hold up the shield and buckler of faith against all opposers.

But what is required hereunto?

1. There is required a clear apprehension in ourselves of those doctrines and truths which we are so to defend. Truth may be lost by weakness as well as by wickedness: if we have not a full apprehension of the truth, and that upon its own proper grounds and principles, we shall never be able to defend it. This is to be attained by all ways and means, by the use especially of diligent prayer and study, so that we may be able to stop the mouth of gainsayers.

2. There is required love of the truth. We shall never contend earnestly for the truth, we shall never 'buy it and not sell it,' whatever we know of it, unless our love and value of it arise from a sense and experience of it in our own souls. I fear there is much loss of truth, not for want of light, knowledge, and ability, but for want of love.

I have the advantage of most here present in this, that I know the contest we had for the truths of the gospel, before our troubles began, and was an early person engaged in them; and knew those godly ministers that did contend for them as for their lives and souls; and that all the opposition that was made against them, was never able to discourage them. What were these doctrines? the doctrines of eternal predestination, effectual conversion to God, and the obduration of wicked reprobates by the providence of God. These truths are not lost for want of skill, but for want of love. We scarce hear one word of them; we are almost ashamed to mention them in the church; and he that doth it will be sure to expose himself to public obloquy and scorn: but we must not be ashamed of truth. Formerly we could not meet with a godly minister, but the error of Arminianism was looked upon by him as the ruin and poison of the souls of men: such did tremble at it, wrote and disputed against it. But now it is not so; the doctrine of the gospel is owned still, though little taken notice of by some among ourselves, the love of it being greatly decayed, the sense and the power of it almost lost; but we have got no ground by it; we are not more holy, more fruitful than we were in the preaching those doctrines, and attending diligently unto them.

3. Let us take heed in ourselves of any inclination to novel opinions, especially in, or about, or against such points of faith, as those wherein they who are gone before us and are fallen asleep, found life, comfort, and power. Who would have thought that we should have come to an indifferency as to the doctrine of justification, and quarrel and dispute about the interest of works in justification, about general redemption, which takes off the efficacy of the redeeming work of Christ, and about the perseverance of the saints; when these were the soul and life of them who were gone before us, who found the power and comfort of them. We shall not maintain these truths unless we find the same comfort in them as they did. I have lived to see great alterations in the godly ministers of the nation, both as to zeal and value of those important truths, that were as the life of the reformation; and the doctrine of free-will condemned in a prayer, bound up in the end of your bibles: but now it is grown an indifferent thing, and the horrible corruptions we suffer to be introduced in the doctrine of justification, have weakened all the vitals of religion. Let us, for the remainder of our days, 'buy the truth and sell it not;' and let us be zealous and watchful over any thing that should arise in our congregations.

Bring one man into the congregation who hath a by-opinion, and he shall make more stir about it than all the rest of the congregation, in building up one another in their most holy faith. Take heed lest there be men arising from ourselves, speaking perverse things; which is to make way for grievous wolves to break in and tear and rend the flock.

4. There is skill and ability required hereunto, to discover and be able to oppose and confound the cunning sophistry of the adversaries. Great prayer, watchfulness, and diligence are required, that we may be able to attend unto these things. And those who are less skilled, may do well to advise with those who are more exercised in them, to give them help and assistance.

Lastly, I shall mention one duty more that is required of pastors and teachers in the church, and that is, that we labour diligently for the conversion of souls. This work is committed to them. I should not mention this, but to rec-

tify a mistake in some. The end of all particular churches, is the calling and edification of the catholic church. Christ hath not appointed his ministers to look unto themselves only; they are to be the means of calling and gathering the elect in all ages: and this they principally are to do by their ministry. I confess there are other outward ways and means whereby men have been, and may be converted. I find by long observation, that common light, in conjunction with afflictions, do begin the conversion of many, without this or that special word: and persons may be converted to God by religious conference. There may be many occasional conversions wrought by the instrumentality of men, who have real spiritual gifts for the dispensation of the word, and are occasionally called thereunto. But principally this work is committed unto the pastors of churches, for the conversion of souls. Take this observation, the first object of the word is the world. Our work is the same with the apostles, the method directly contrary; the apostles had a work committed to them, and this was their method: the first work committed to the apostles was the convincing and converting sinners to Christ among Jews and Gentiles; to preach the gospel, to convert infidels; this they accounted their chief work. Paul made nothing of administering the ordinance of baptism, in comparison of it. 'Christ did not send me,' saith he, 'to baptize, but to preach the gospel;' 1 Cor. i. 17. In comparison, I say, preaching was their chief work. And then, their second work was to teach these disciples to do and observe whatever Christ commanded them, and to bring them into church order; this was their method. Now the same work is committed unto the pastors of churches, but in a contrary method. The first object of our ministry is the church; to build up and edify the church. But what then? Is the other part of the work taken away, that they should not preach to convert souls? God forbid. There be several ways whereby they who are pastors of churches do preach to the conversion of souls. 1. When other persons that are unconverted do come where they are preaching to their own congregations (whereof we have experience every day), they are there converted to God by the pastoral discharge of their duty. No, say some, they preach

to the church as ministers, to others only as spiritually gifted. But no man can make this distinction in his own conscience. Suppose there be five hundred in this place, and a hundred of this church; can you make the distinction, that I am preaching in a double capacity, to some as a minister, and to others not as a minister? Neither rule, nor reason, nor natural light expresses any thing to that purpose. We preach as ministers to those to whom we preach, for the conversion of their souls. 2. Ministers may preach for the conversion of souls, when they preach elsewhere occasionally. They preach as ministers wherever they preach. I know the indelible character is a figment; but the pastor's office is not such a thing as men may leave at home when they go abroad. It is not in a minister's own power, unless lawfully dismissed or deposed, to hinder him from preaching as a minister. And it is the duty of particular churches (one end of their institution being the calling and gathering the catholic church), to part with their officers for a season, when called to preach in other places for the converting souls to Christ. We had a glorious ministry in the last age; wonderful instruments for the conversion of souls. Did they convert them as gifted men, and not as ministers? God forbid. I say, it may be done by them who have received gifts, and not called to office. But I know no ground any man hath to give up himself to the constant exercise of ministerial gifts; and not say to the Lord in prayer, 'Lord, here am I, send me.'

Had I time and strength, I should tell you of the duty of pastors and teachers in administering of the seals; and what is required thereunto.

And their duty in directing and comforting the consciences of all sorts of believers. What prudence, purity, condescension and patience are required in it, as a great part of our ministerial duty.

I should shew you also their duty in the rule of the church. Not that ever Christ intended to commit the rule of the church to them alone, to take them off from that great and important duty of preaching the gospel; but as time and occasions will allow them, to attend to the rule of the church.

And lastly, in exemplary conversation ; and in assembling with other churches of their order, for the managing church communion.

‘Who is sufficient for these things ?’ Pray, pray for us ; and God strengthen us, and our brother, who hath been called this day to the work ; it may not be unuseful to him and me, to be mindful of these things, and to beg the assistance of our brethren.

SERMON VI.*

To the chief Musician upon Shoshannim, for the sons of Korah, Maschil:
A Song of loves.

My heart is inditing a good matter : I speak of the things which I have made touching the king ; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer, &c.—PSAL. xlv. 1—3.

THE whole book of Psalms hath a peculiar respect unto Jesus Christ, either directly, or in the person of David, who was his greatest personal type, next to Aaron and Melchisedec. But there are some psalms that are altogether directly prophetical of him, and of his offices, viz. the second psalm is prophetical of his kingdom; the sixteenth psalm, of the work of his mediation, and obedience to God therein; the twenty-second, of his priestly office, his sufferings, death, his resurrection and intercession; the fortieth, of his oblation and suffering; the seventy-second, of his kingly and prophetical power and glorious regard unto his people; the sixty-eighth, of his glorious exaltation; and this forty-fifth psalm is a prophecy and description of his person, and his kingly office, and of the espousals of him and his church.

The title of the psalm is, 'To the chief musician upon Shoshannim for the sons of Korah, Maschil: A Song of loves.'

'To the chief musician;' so למונצח is generally rendered, to him that excels: as נצח signifies 'eternal,' I have sometimes thought it might be as well rendered, 'In perpetuum rei memoriam,' 'For an everlasting remembrance.' But we may take it in the common acceptation, that it was recommended unto him that did preside over the rest of the Levites in the worship of God in the temple, by singing on instruments of music.

'Upon Shoshannim.' The word signifies 'lilies;' whether it was a musical instrument, or a certain tune, we know not, neither do the Jews.

* This sermon was preached June 7, 1674, at Statham.

‘For the sons of Korah;’ who these were, we may see, 1 Chron. ix. 19. ‘The Korahites were over the work of the service, keepers of the gates of the tabernacle,’ &c. What were they else? ver. 33. ‘These are the singers, chief of the fathers of the Levites, who, remaining in the chambers, were free;’ for they were employed in the work of singing the praises of God with instruments of music, day and night.

David was the first who brought musical instruments into the solemn worship of God: not but that they did occasionally make use of timbrels and cymbals, in the praises of God before; but he was the first that brought in a great number of musical instruments into the worship of God. And he speaks expressly in 1 Chron. xxiii. 5. of praising God with instruments of music, ‘which,’ says he, ‘I made.’ He did it by the direction of the Spirit of God; otherwise he ought not to have done it: for so it is said, 1 Chron. xxviii. 12. When he had established all the ordinances of the temple, ‘the pattern which he had of all by the Spirit.’ And ver. 19. ‘All this, said David, the Lord made me understand in writing, even all the works of this pattern.’ It was all revealed unto him by the Holy Spirit, without which he could have introduced nothing at all into the worship of God. The Lord prepared him for this service while he was a shepherd; at which time he had attained great skill in singing on musical instruments.

And I cannot but observe, by the way, that it is a great mercy when God will engage the natural faculties and abilities of men, especially wherein they are excellent, in any way of his service. David had got an excellency in this faculty, and God engages it in his service. As those that had skill therein, and were not so engaged, are condemned in the prophet Amos, vi. 5. What were they condemned for? Why, that they would invent instruments of music like David. David did it to serve the Lord, and they did it to serve their lusts. Where men have any peculiar faculty or ability, it is an unspeakable mercy to have it engaged for God; for otherwise it will certainly be engaged for the devil: and, to render the mercy more singular, I think it is evident, the devil hath got the use and advantage of natural faculties and abilities, above what is given up to God.

Again, this was David's special inclination; whence he is called 'the sweet psalmist of Israel;' the edge of his spirit lay to it. And we may observe, that it is an excellent mercy, when the edge of our spirits, in special inclination, is engaged for the service of God. Prov. xxvii. 17. 'As iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.' Every man hath an edge; and there are several ways whereby it is sharpened. There is no man but cuts one way or other; and company and society is the great means whereby the edge is sharpened. One cuts to the world, another to pleasures, to lusts; and such company makes him more sharp. It is well when the edge of a man's spirit is set for the things of God, and he has some to sharpen that edge; for that way that a man's edge is set, that way is he. He may do something in the worship of God; but if his edge be to the world, that way is he; and if his edge be to lust and pleasure, that way is he. Now here was David; the special inclination and edge of his spirit was set towards God, and so was employed of God.

There is a general title given to this psalm, 'Maschil;' that is, a song to make wise, or to give instruction. They are the things of Christ, that, in an especial manner, are suited to give instruction to the church of God.

The special matter of the psalm is, 'A Song of loves.'

And why is it called 'loves?'

It may be upon three accounts. 1. Because the psalm mentions a mutual and interchangeable love. It is not only of the love of Christ to his church, nor only of the love of the church unto Christ; but is mutual, of the love of Christ to the church, and of the church to Christ, so that it is a song of loves. 2. It may be put in the plural number, by way of eminency, which is frequent in the Hebrew; of loves, that is, of the most excellent love, such, as none other is to be compared unto it. 3. It may be called so, because of the manifold fruits of that one single love, that is between Christ and his church. Though it be but a single love on each hand, yet various are the fruits of it; which will be described in the next verse.

I principally look upon it to be called so in the second sense, because it is more eminent than any other love in the

world; the mystical, spiritual love that is between Christ and the church, is the most excellent love.

It is a 'Song of loves.' I shall not speak unto you of the nature of songs. 'Let him that is merry,' saith James, chap. v. 13. (or in a rejoicing, cheerful frame of heart and spirit) 'sing psalms.' So that singing was a means appointed of God, whereby men should express their joy in a way of thankfulness.

Thus this title of the psalms will yield us these two observations.

I. That the espousals of Christ and his church, or the mutual love that is between Christ and his church, is a subject matter for a song of great joy.

II. It is not a song of love, but it is a song of loves; I observe from thence, that there is no love like the love of Christ to his church in the day of espousals, and to every believing soul; it hath an eminency in it above all other love whatever.

I. This love of Christ and the church in their espousals, is matter of great joy and rejoicing.

1. It is so to God himself. He expresses the frame of his heart therein, Zeph. iii. 17. 'He will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing.' The union of Christ and a believer (for it is spoken of there), is a matter of unspeakable joy to God himself. Not that God is subject to the like affections with us; but he expresses it to the height in Jer. xxxii. 41. that we may know how the heart of God approves it, 'He rejoices over his people to do them good, with his whole heart, and with his whole soul;' so that it is a song of loves to God himself: also in Isa. lxii. 4, 5. 'The Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. For as a young man marieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.' Many other places might be given to this purpose.

2. It is matter of joy to Jesus Christ. Cant. iii. 11. 'Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart.' This Solomon was a type of Christ; and the

mother of Christ, that brought forth Christ as to his human nature, was the church : and in the espousals of the church to Christ, set a crown upon his head ; see Psal. xvi. 6. ‘ The lines,’ saith Christ, in reference to his church, ‘ are fallen to me in pleasant places, yea I have a goodly heritage ;’ it is the approbation that Christ gives of his church, when he is espoused unto it, in the day of the gladness of his heart.

3. It is matter of joy to believers themselves ; 1 Pet. i. 8. ‘ In whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice, with joy unspeakable and full of glory.’ It is, I say, matter of joy and praise unto them.

Why are the loves of Christ and his church, or the espousals of Christ and a believing soul, matter of such joy, as to be the subject of a song of loves to God himself, to Jesus Christ, and to believers ?

(1.) Because on the part of God, it is that wherein the glorious design and purpose of his grace is accomplished, and his goodness satisfied. ‘ God doth all things for the praise of the glory of his grace ;’ Eph. i. 6. Wherefore, when this grace of God is accomplished, and his goodness satisfied, it is matter of rejoicing unto God. When he had laid the foundation of the old creation, and all the sons of God shouted for joy, God himself looked upon all, and behold it was very good ; he approved his whole work : and when he carried on the work of the new creation, whereof this I am speaking of is the greatest instance, even the espousal loves between Christ and a believing soul, having accomplished such a work of grace and power and goodness as this is, God himself doth approve of it ; it is matter of joy unto him.

(2.) It is matter of joy to Jesus Christ, because ‘ he sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied.’ This is that he laboured for, Isa. liii. 8, &c. It was matter of joy to Jacob, when he had obtained Rachel to be his wife, that he had got that he laboured for ; ‘ he served for a wife,’ saith the Holy Ghost, Hos. xii. 12. Why, the Lord Jesus Christ, when he hath united his church to himself, and in proportion any believing soul, he hath that which he hath laboured for. He sees of the travail of his soul ; it cost him prayers and tears, blood and death ; but now he sees what it is come unto ; it

hath produced this bride for him, or believing souls to be united to him, and he is satisfied; he fulfilled a hard service, but it was for his bride, in whom his soul delighted, as he does in every believing soul, when he hath made them comely through his comeliness, or, in and through the righteousness he puts upon them.

(3.) It is certainly matter of joy to all believers themselves, because it instates them in those new relations, and in that condition, which they, for their part, never ought to have expected, or looked for, as to any thing that was in themselves. And therefore the prophet Isaiah, chap. liv. 5. calls upon the church to rejoice exceedingly, because, 'thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the holy One of Israel: the God of the whole earth shall he be called.' All grace and privilege, all mercy, pardon; every thing else we enjoy in this world, and hope for in another, depends upon this, of relation unto Jesus Christ; therefore certainly it is matter of joy and rejoicing to believers.

That which we may learn from hence, by way of use, is,

1. The infinite wisdom, goodness, and condescension of God in disposing the way of saving poor sinners, so as that it shall be matter of joy and rejoicing to him, to Jesus Christ, and to believers themselves. It was infinite wisdom and grace that God would dispose any way for the salvation of his creatures. He gave out a way to Adam, whereby (by perfect obedience) he might have attained life, immortality, and glory. That was not a way that did issue in such great joy to God, to Christ, or to ourselves, as this doth, where God is glorified, Christ satisfied, and believers themselves are surprised. We were poor, desolate, forlorn, lost creatures; and that God should bring us into a way of saving us, so as that the heart of God and Christ, and our own hearts should rejoice in it; this calls for our admiration. I know it is hard for us to believe it; yet I know it is true, that God himself is rejoiced, and Christ rejoices in the taking of any one soul into espousals with himself. And which may add more, all the angels in heaven rejoice too; Luke xv. 10. 'There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents,' because God

is so glorified, and Christ so exalted. God hath put this way of converting and saving sinners into such a channel, as will tend to his glory, and the glory of Christ, and so be matter of joy unto them.

2. Let us inquire, whether we have found, or do find this joy in our own hearts. Is the remembrance of the closing of our hearts with Christ, a song of loves unto us? Truly, if our loves be earnest and intent upon other things, we find joy and refreshment in them; but are we not dead, and cold to the thoughts of this great and excellent advantage of being espoused to Christ, as all believers are? if so, it is but a sad evidence we are so truly espoused. Alas! If a poor beggar, a deformed creature, should be taken into the espousals of a great prince, would she not be sensible of it? We are poor, deformed, woful, sinful, polluted creatures, and for us to be taken into this relation with Jesus Christ; where are our hearts? Why do not we rejoice in the Lord with joy unspeakable and full of glory? Is it not because Christ hath not our whole hearts? because we are not so entirely with him, and for him in our affections as becomes this relation? because the world hath too much hold upon us? Shall God rejoice, and Christ rejoice? Shall it be a song of loves to God and Christ, that we are brought into this relation? and these dull hearts of ours be no farther affected with it? We ought to be ashamed to think how little we are concerned in this so great a privilege; how little lifted up above the world, and alienated from the world; if indeed we are partakers of this mercy.

II. The second observation from its being a song of loves, is this, That there is no love like to the love between Christ and the souls of believers. There are flaming loves in some to their lusts; in others to the world, that even devour them; but yet I will say again, upon ten thousand accounts, there is no love like to the love between Christ and the souls of believers.

Should we go to speak now of the love of Christ, on the one side, it is an ocean, we cannot fathom it. The best act of our souls towards Christ's love is admiration, astonishing admiration, till the heart is quite overwhelmed with it, till our thoughts and understandings are, as it were, lost; the soul is taken out of itself, and laid in the dust as nothing, to

be swallowed up in a holy contemplation of the unspeakable, inconceivable love of Jesus Christ.

I will name three heads of it, that may help us in this admiration, to see that it is a love that is inimitable: the fiery loves of men after this world, and their lusts, are not to be named the same day with it.

1. Consider it in its condescension. Now, I think, we shall all confess that this love is inimitable, because nothing but infinite, divine power, and wisdom could work such an effect as was the condescension of the Son of God; out of his love to take our nature upon him, to become flesh as we are; and God never wrought it, nor will, but in that instance, to all eternity. And therefore this love hath the pre-eminence above all other loves whatsoever. In Phil. ii. 6—8. it is there set forth, where he unites those things that are set at an infinite distance of being. He stoops so low, that he saith, Psal. xxii. 6. ‘I am a worm, and no man;’ he comes to the lowest condition mankind can be reduced unto in this condescension; and surely this hath a pre-eminence above all other loves whatsoever.

2. The love of Christ was manifested in his suffering in that condition. You know what he suffered, and what he suffered for; he suffered to bear the guilt of our sins, so to take away the wrath of God; he suffered to wash away the filth of our sins, so to take away shame and confusion from our souls; he suffered to redeem us from the world, poor captive creatures as we were, that we might be his own; and therefore God gives us the type of it in the prophet Hosea, chap. iii. by a harlot; and Christ bought us when we were harlots with the world (our hearts going after sin and Satan), that we might be his property. He suffered for us so as to bear the guilt of our iniquities, that there may be no wrath from God upon us; I will pay, saith Christ, what I never took away. ‘For a good man it is possible, some would even dare to die;’ Rom. v. 7. but saith he, here is love, Christ died for us when we were sinners, when we were enemies. ‘He loved us, and washed us in his own blood,’ that we may be purified from the filth of our sins; he loved us, and redeemed us out of every kindred and nation in the world. Here lay all misery, the guilt of sin that rendered us obnoxious to the curse of God, and the filth of sin that made

us odious to God, and kept us under the power of the world. This love hath suffered on purpose to redeem us from all this.

3. The care and tenderness which the Lord Jesus Christ continues to manifest towards us, now he is in heaven, while we are upon the earth, is another fruit of this love; Heb. v. 2. This high priest knows how to 'have compassion on the ignorant, and them that are out of the way.' Chap. iv. 15. 'He hath been touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and in all points tempted like as we;' and 'he lives for ever to make intercession for us.' In these things he expresses his love to, and care for, his people.

On the other side, I say, the love of believers to Christ is inexpressible, or beyond all other love whatsoever.

1. In a way of value, Matt. xiii. 45. When the merchantman had found the precious pearl, he sells all he hath to buy it. Believers will part with all they have, to obtain Christ; for they prefer him above all. What will they not part with, and what do they not part with, and deny for Christ? whereby you may see it is a love that is transcendent to all other loves.

(1.) They part with their sin, lust, and corruption. There is not a believer in the world, but hath naturally as great a love of, and adherence to, sin, lust, and corruption, as the highest debauched person upon the face of the earth. But a believer will part with them all, subdue them all, so that he might win Christ, which manifests it to be a transcendent love; and they that will not do this, are not believers. If our hearts are not engaged to the mortifying of all sin, lust, and corruption, as he enables us, we are not married to Christ, for 'they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts;' Gal. v. 24.

(2.) They will part with their righteousness for Christ. This was that the Jews would not give up, that they might obtain justification. They had a righteousness which was according to the law; and, saith the apostle, Rom. x. 3. 'They will not submit to the righteousness of God, but go about to establish their own righteousness.' All the righteousness which is in the world, that the men of the world value before Christ, while they are engaged in their lusts and pleasures, they will not part with it for Christ. Yea, even

when they are wrought off their lusts and pleasures by conviction to some duties, yet they will not part with their own righteousness for Christ. But believers will part with theirs, and count it all as loss and dung.

If corruption be subdued, and righteousness be given up, what remains? Truly,

(3.) Self remains. If a man denies not himself in lawful things, in any thing that will hinder his walking with God, and living unto God, which will make him unfaithful in his place, or unfruitful to please God, he is not worthy of him. If he cannot deny his ease, liberty, peace, profit, or pleasure, he is not worthy of Jesus Christ. Now that love, which will carry a man out to deny all ungodliness and lust, to renounce all his own righteousness, to lose all he hath wrought in his own strength, to deny himself upon every instance wherein Christ requires him; this is a transcendent love, above all other love whatsoever.

2. The love of believers manifests itself also in suffering for Christ; and O who can tell what the martyrs endured from love to the Lord Jesus?

So that this psalm which treats of the espousals of Christ, and believers, may well have this title, 'A Song of loves;' it being the most excellent love.

Two things from hence are incumbent upon us.

First, to labour to get a sense of this love of Christ upon our hearts. If we are believers, all this love of Christ, who is 'King of kings, and Lord of lords,' is fixed upon every one of our souls; and it is our great duty to labour to let in a sense of this love of Christ into them. Out of his abundant love and grace, and for no other reason in the world, he loved us when we were strangers, he reconciled us to himself when we were enemies, and engaged in enmity against him; give him then the glory of his sovereign grace, with respect to your own souls. And,

Secondly, Let us examine ourselves whether we have this transcendent love to Jesus Christ in our hearts. If we have, it will continually keep us up to the mortification of lust and corruption, to the renouncing of all self-righteousness, to the denying ourselves; and it will make us continually ready for all the service and suffering Christ shall call us unto.

SERMON VII.*

My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the king: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever. Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty.—Psal. xlv. 1—3.

THIS psalm hath three parts, the title of it is, ‘A Song of loves;’ which I have already spoken unto. The preface of it in the first verse. And the song itself from the second verse to the end.

The first verse contains a preface to this song of loves. ‘My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the king: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer.’

I shall offer a few things from these words.

Observe in general, that he that lays a good foundation, makes a good beginning of what he hath to say. It is from his heart; ‘My heart,’ saith he, ‘is inditing.’ If things do not begin at the heart, whatsoever we do about spiritual things, they are of no value, of no use. We may perform duties, we may pray and preach, and hear; but if these things do not spring from the heart, that is, from faith, and love, and delight working in the heart, all is lost. A sacrifice without a heart, a silly dove that has no heart, are things God abhors; Hos. vii. 11.

The heart of the psalmist was in this matter; and if our heart be in it, it will be a duty, in our measure and proportion, good and acceptable with God, as it was with him.

There are in the verse two things. I. The subject matter treated of in this song of loves. II. The manner of expressing it.

I. The subject treated of. 1. In general, that it is a good matter. It is not a song about vain empty things; much less about wicked and sinful things, as the songs of the world are; neither is it only about things that are true, but

* This sermon was preached at Stadham, June 7, 1674.

have no goodness in them ; but, saith he, my heart is inditing a good matter.

2. What this good matter is, is declared, 'I speak of the things which I have made touching the king.' The subject, saith he, of this song of mine, is the king ; it is no ordinary person. It was the name whereby they called the Messiah, 'Christ the Lord,' under the Old Testament, who is indeed 'the Lord of lords, and King of kings.' 'I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion ;' Psal. ii. 6. He was principally prophesied of as a prince, a ruler, a captain, being to deliver the people of God. He is the subject of the song. And it is limited to things touching or concerning him ; as if he had said, it is not for me, it is not for any mortal man to conceive or express all the glories and excellencies of the great King, Jesus Christ ; but, saith he, something touching, something concerning him.

The best we can reach or attain unto in this world, is only something touching Christ. We cannot yet behold the King in his glory, we cannot see his uncreated excellencies or beauties, nor those unspeakable glories of his person, natures, and works, as we shall one day contemplate and behold.

'I speak,' saith he, 'of the things I have made ;' that is, which I have prepared ; I will mention only the things which I have composed concerning Christ.

So that the subject of this song, is in general, a good matter ; in particular, things touching Christ, and such things as the psalmist, through the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, had composed.

II. There is the manner of their delivery, both as to their conception, and as to outward expression ; their conception, it was in his heart ; as to the outward delivery, it was by his tongue. And there is a peculiarity in both. It is not an ordinary conception of the heart, it is not a common expression of the tongue. If you will look into the margin of your bibles, you will find, that what we have rendered here, 'inditing,' in the original, signifies 'boiling' or 'bubbling up.' The word refers to the bubbling up of water in a fountain or spring. The heart of the psalmist was so full of these things of Christ, things touching the King, that they did naturally overflow, as water rising out of a spring na-

turally flows into the stream, without any labour or difficulty. It was no hard thing to him to speak of things of Christ, his heart was full of them. O, that it was thus with us! It is promised, it shall be so, in John iv. 14. Christ hath promised to give his people his Spirit, that shall be as a well of water in them, springing up to everlasting life.

My tongue, saith he, shall not only express it, but in a peculiar manner, 'my tongue is the pen of a ready writer.'

A ready writer, one speedy, steady, able to set down any thought, or conception whatsoever. When we deal about the things of Christ, there is a peculiar manner required both in the conception of the heart, and in the expression of the tongue.

Thus I have given you the sense of the words; and I shall now name some observations from them.

First, That the things which concern Jesus Christ, are a good matter to believers. They are not only true, so as the mind may assent unto them, and never be deceived; but they have that in them which is the object of the soul's delight and valuation, and which the soul of a believer cleaves unto. The truth of it is, here lies the great difference between sincere believers, and mere hypocrites. Hypocrites assent unto the doctrine of the gospel, things touching the King, as true, but they never embrace them as good; their hearts and affections do not cleave unto them, as finding a real sweetness, excellency, and suitableness unto their wants in them; for no man esteems that to be good, which is not suitable unto him.

Jesus Christ, and the things of Christ, are a good matter unto believers; for,

1. They are very excellent in themselves. Col. i. 18. 'He hath in all things the pre-eminence.' Whatsoever is good in any kind, it all centres in Christ. And what is in him is better than that which was in the state of nature; better than what was in the law; better than what is in self-righteousness; better than life itself: so that from their own nature, they are good things. Give me leave to say, they are good things, because they are God's best things. As to temporal good things, take a king, or a potentate, his best things are peculiar treasures, gold and silver, and precious stones: but the things which concern Christ, are the best

things of the kingdom of heaven. The things which concern God's only begotten Son, and which concern all the wisdom, grace, love, and power, the holy God will exercise in the greatest work he ever set his hand to; surely they are good things. When the psalmist saith it is a good matter, his meaning is, it is the best matter in the world.

2. They are a good matter to believers, because they have received the Spirit whereby they are able to discern the excellency of them. As to others, it is said, 'He shall grow up as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he has no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him;' Isa. liii. 2. Can we see no goodness, no excellency in Christ, in the grace of Christ, in his ways, in his people, why he should be desired? Believers can; 1 Cor. ii. 7—10. The Spirit of God discovers to them the excellent things of Christ, whereby they find them to be good; when as to strangers from Christ they seem absurd, and foolish things, and no way to be desired. Men of carnal wisdom, that have attained to the highest pitch of reason, and ability in the world, they can see neither form nor comeliness in Christ, nor the things of Christ: but, when God opens the things of Christ by the Spirit, then they see that there is a goodness, and an excellency in them.

By way of use. Seeing the things of Christ are good things in themselves, and believers discern their goodness, and their excellency; we may do well then to inquire, whether the things of Christ are good things to us? Then they are good things to us, when we desire them above all other things whatsoever. Phil. iii. 8. 'I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.' He could make use of those things he had; but in comparison, his heart did really esteem them all as loss and dung, when they stood in competition with Christ. And pray let us consider, how the psalmist hath here stated it; saith he, My heart indites, and my tongue professes. It is easy to profess, that the things of Christ are good things, and that we esteem all other things as loss and dung; but do our hearts so esteem them? otherwise we come short of what is here intended by the psalmist. Do our hearts really value the good things of Christ? Things concerning the glory of

his person; his love to his church; the excellency of his kingdom, and his rule; the things here treated of? The glory of his person, 'Fairer than the children of men;' the glory of his kingdom, 'in thy majesty, ride prosperously; thy throne O God is for ever and ever:' and his love to his church, 'Hearken, O daughter, and consider and incline thine ear, forget also thine own people, and thy father's house, so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty.' Do we value these things, I say, in our very hearts, so as to esteem all other things as loss and dung, that we could freely forego them? Do we find satisfaction in the things of Christ, with and without all other things? With other things? It is the will of God, while he intrusts us with other things, that we should use them to his glory. But is our satisfaction in the good things of Christ so high, that we can be satisfied without other things? Truly I hope the Lord will help us, that if we come to lose all things for the good things of Christ (and how soon we may come to such a time we know not), we may do it cheerfully and willingly. This I can say, that the nearer some have been to the losing of all things, even life itself, the better Christ hath been unto them. And I would pray for you, that if God should reserve us for such a time, as to deprive us of all other things, that this may grow upon our hearts, that the things of Christ are better than ever you apprehended. This will carry us through all our darkness and trouble; to be satisfied with them, in the want of other things. And take it for your comfort, though you may tremble now at the parting with a hair of your head, as if it was the garment from your back; yet, if you are sincere believers, when you come to part with all, you will do it cheerfully. Christ will come in, and enable you so to do. Examine therefore yourselves, whether you do not only give a naked assent to the gospel, and the things of Christ; or whether you find a goodness in them, a suitableness and satisfaction in them; that it is a good matter unto you.

Secondly, Observe from the words, that it is the duty of believers to be making things concerning Jesus Christ. 'Things that I have made touching the king.' Now, to be making things concerning Jesus Christ, is to meditate upon them, to have firm and fixed meditations upon Christ, and upon the glory of his excellencies: this is it that here is

called, 'The things I have made,' composed, framed in my mind. He did not make pictures of Christ, or frame such and such images of him; but he meditated upon Christ. It is called 'beholding the glory of the Lord in a glass,' in 2 Cor. iii. 18. What is the glory of the Lord? Why, it is the glory of his person; the glory of his kingdom; the glory of his love. Where are these to be seen? They are all represented in the glass; what glass? the glass of the gospel. The gospel hath a reflection upon it, of all these glories of Christ, and makes a representation of them unto us. What is our work and business? Why, it is to behold this glory, that is, to contemplate upon it by faith, to meditate upon it, which is here called making 'things touching the king.' This is also called 'Christ's dwelling in us,' Eph. iii. 17. and 'the word of Christ dwelling richly in us,' Col. iii. 16. which is, when the soul abounds in thoughts of Christ. I have had more advantage by private thoughts of Christ, than by any thing in this world; and I think, when a soul hath satisfying and exalting thoughts of Christ himself, his person, and his glory, it is the way whereby Christ dwells in such a soul. If I have observed any thing by experience, it is this, a man may take the measure of his growth, and decay in grace, according to his thoughts and meditations upon the person of Christ, and the glory of Christ's kingdom, and of his love. A heart that is inclined to converse with Christ, as he is represented in the gospel, is a thriving heart; and if estranged from it, and backward to it, it is under deadness and decays.

'Touching the king.' The psalmist hath respect unto Christ as a king. Hence,

Thirdly, Observe that there is a peculiar glory in the kingly office of Jesus Christ, that we should daily exercise our thoughts about. The comfort, joy, and refreshment of believers in this world, lies in the kingly power of Christ. What a view is there taken of him, in Isa. lxiii. 1. 'Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? This that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save;' and which refers us to but one part of his kingly office, viz. to the power he will put forth in destroying his enemies. It is generally thought that Edom,

under the Old Testament, shadows forth Rome under the New : this is a glorious description of Christ going forth in the greatness of his power, when the year of his redeemed is come, and the day of vengeance is in his heart. How dreadful will it be to the world ! how glorious in the eyes of believers ! when we shall see him glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength, till he hath destroyed all his stubborn adversaries.

There is a peculiar glory in the kingdom of Christ, that we ought much for our relief to meditate upon. If we could behold the internal, and external workings of Christ ; what he hath done, what he will do, how that certainly he will save every believer, how that certainly he will destroy every enemy, how infallible in his grace, and never failing in his vengeance ; we should then see a peculiar glory in his kingdom.

Fourthly, Observe, that when a heart is full of love to Christ, it will run over ; then men will be speaking of Christ, and of his glory. ‘ We believe,’ saith the apostle, ‘ and therefore we speak ;’ 2 Cor. iv. 13. If we do believe, we shall speak : and, saith the apostle, Acts iv. 20. ‘ When they said, Speak no more in this name,’ saith he, ‘ We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard ;’ we cannot but speak them. On the contrary, there is sad evidence, how little there is of love in the hearts of men towards Christ. Alas ! look about to the multitudes of them that are called Christians, when do you hear a word of him ? When do you meet with a heart overflowing with love to Christ ? Some speak of him to blaspheme him ; some to the reproach of him ; but for a natural readiness to speak for him, where do we find it ? Yet if the heart be filled, it will boil over. There are some that pass for professors ; you shall very seldom hear a word of Christ from them. If a man would make himself a reproach in the world, he cannot better do it, than by owning Christ and his Spirit before men.

Fifthly, and lastly, That profession alone is acceptable to God, and useful in the church, which proceeds from the fulness of the heart. It is to no purpose to have our tongue as the pen of a ready writer, if our hearts be not full. It must come from the boiling or meditation of our hearts, if our profession be good and acceptable.

This is the preface of the song.

SERMON VIII.*

Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever.—Psal. xlv. 2.

I HAVE given you an account of the general design and scope of this psalm already; and spoken something from the title of it, ‘To the chief musician,’ &c. And opened the first verse, and spoken something to that also; which is the preface to the whole psalm.

I shall now speak something to you from the second verse.

‘Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever.’

You know who it is that is intended in these words, namely, ‘our Lord Jesus Christ,’ the King the Messiah; and this is a description of him, which the psalmist gives in prophecy.

There are three parts of the verse:

I. A description of Christ’s person; ‘Thou art fairer than the children of men.’

II. An account of his endowments, that were bestowed upon him, to enable him to his work; ‘grace is poured into thy lips.’

III. God’s acceptance and approbation of him in his work; ‘Therefore God hath blessed thee for ever.’

I. Here is a description of Christ’s person; ‘Thou art fairer than the children of men.’

You may consider it, 1. Absolutely, that Christ is fair. 2. Comparatively, that he is fairer than the children of men.

1. Absolutely, Christ is fair. He ascribes beauty to him. There is mention of the beauty of God in Psal. xxvii. 4. ‘To behold the beauty of the Lord: that may concern his worship. But it is directly spoken of God himself, in Zech. ix. 17. ‘How great is his goodness, and how

* This sermon was preached at Stadham, June 11, 1674.

great is his beauty !' As beauty among men consists in the symmetry of parts ; so in God, it is the harmony of all the divine perfections. The infinite harmony, agreeableness, suitableness of all divine perfections, I say, is this beauty. Christ is called fair, to denote his glorious perfections.

2. Comparatively; 'Thou art fairer than the children of men;' that is, (1.) than all worldly men. There is more excellency, more desirableness in Jesus Christ, than in all the men of the world. (2.) More than in all those who were employed in the church, which is peculiarly here intended. More excellent than Moses and Aaron ; than any of the kings and prophets of old, who yet were so desirable. Aaron had his garments made for beauty, and for glory. But, saith he, Christ is more beautiful, more fair, than any of the children of men.

I told you, the design of the psalm was to speak of the kingdom of Christ, and to set forth the mutual love that is between Christ and his church. But yet, in the first place, he lays down this description of his person, as the foundation, 'thou art fairer than the children of men.'

I say, 1. Absolutely, Christ is fair, and we may observe from hence, that, in the consideration of Jesus Christ, if we intend any interest in him, and any benefit by him, the first thing we ought to know, and consider, is his person. So the psalmist here, when he had designed the description of his kingdom, and benefits, he begins with his person. And if we know not the person of Christ, we have no interest in him. The apostle, in Phil. iii. 10. shews what our design should be, 'That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings,' &c. first, know him, says he, before he speaks of the benefits of his mediation, which is consequential to the knowledge of himself. So he tells you of the subject of his preaching ; 1 Cor. ii. 2. 'I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified;' first, Christ, and then, him crucified ; first, his person, and then his mediation.

The reasons are,

(1.) Because Jesus Christ will be loved and preferred above all 'for his own sake.' He tells his disciples, Matt. x. 37. 'He that loveth father or mother more than me, is

not worthy of me.' If we intend to have any benefit by him, he must be valued above all, for his own sake, or, for the sake of what he is in himself. He puts it as a mark upon them that followed him, 'because of the loaves;' John vi. 26. And if without the knowledge of Christ, without a due consideration of his person, we think to follow him only for his benefits, for the advantage which we hope to have by him, which is to follow him for the loaves, we shall be found strangers to him, when we think we are in a better state and condition.

(2.) Without this, no man can secure his love and faith from being selfish, or from beginning and ending in self. For if we regard only those things whereof we have advantage, so that we may have our sin pardoned, our iniquities done away, and our souls saved, we would not care whether there were a Christ to trust in or no. But as this tends not to the glory of God, so neither will it tend to the advantage of our own souls. So that if we intend any interest in Christ, we must begin with his person, and the knowledge of it; 'Thou art fairer than the children of men.'

The use of this point is,

First, To shew how few real Christians there be in the world; seeing there are so few that have an acquaintance with, and a love unto, the person of Christ. Some deny him. We have a generation among ourselves that pretend to be Christians, I mean the Quakers, who deny the person of Christ, leave him neither the perfection of the Deity, nor humanity, nor the union of his natures; and have framed to themselves a religion without Christ; a carcase without a soul, or life to quicken it, or enable it to be of any use. And there are others, that evidence how little it is they value Christ, 1 Cor. ii. 8. 'Had they known him, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.' Do we think, if men knew Christ, whatsoever they pretend, they would so despise his ways, his ordinances, his worship? prefer their own inventions and imaginations before them, and prosecute and persecute all that truly fear him, according to the power of their hand? Had they known him, they would not have done so. And the greatest part are perfectly sottish, brutishly ignorant concerning the person of Christ; yea, many to whom he hath been preached, it is to them like the wind, they hear a sound,

but know not whence it comes, or what it means; perhaps they never had one serious thought in all their lives what Christ is, or who he is? wherein his excellencies do consist? or what they expect from him? O how few labour to have a familiar intercourse with this Saviour? How few say to wisdom, 'Thou art my sister, and call understanding their kinswoman,' as in Prov. vii. 4. speaking of Christ, who is the wisdom of God. They that know Christ, will make him as near and familiar to their souls as they can.

Secondly, This shews, what great cause they have to rejoice, unto whom God hath revealed Christ. Matt. xvi. 13, &c. 'Whom do men say I am,' saith Christ to his disciples? 'And they said, Some say thou art John the baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.' The world has very dark notions concerning Christ, like the blind man, that saw men like trees walking: but as for those who have the knowledge of Christ, they are blessed, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it. It is the greatest spiritual revelation, and the greatest evidence that we have received any spiritual revelation from God, when we know the person of Christ. Let us be thankful for any revelation God hath made of Christ unto our souls, that we behold his person, and know him, that he is not a stranger unto us, but that our souls have some holy acquaintance with him.

And if God hath thus revealed Christ unto us, Let us be manifesting to all the world, that we are Christ's, when others are ashamed of him. How? By our prizing, valuing, preferring him above all other things, above the world, and all the satisfactions and enjoyments of the world, above its ways, pleasures, converse: we have better satisfaction, better acquaintance to converse with, and retire unto.

2. Observe from the words, that in the knowledge of Christ, what we should chiefly consider, are the things wherein he is fairer than the children of men, wherein he is more excellent, and to be preferred above all other persons and things whatsoever.

Now, wherein is Christ fairer than the children of men?

I answer, in three things, (1.) In the dignity of his person. (2.) In the excellency of his work. And, (3.) In the power and heavenliness of his doctrine. Many other instances may be given, but things may be gathered to these three heads, whereby we may make answer unto the question, that is tacitly asked of us by nominal professors in the world, which was asked of the spouse, by the daughters of Jerusalem, Cant. v. 9. 'What is thy beloved more than another beloved?' What is there in Christ more than in other persons and things, that there is such a stir made about him? I say, 'he is fairer than the children of men;'

(1.) In the dignity of his person. He is a more excellent person. Wherein consists the excellency of Christ's person? Truly not at all in the outward appearance of his human nature, especially while here in the world. It is the foundation of all devotion among some, the making of glorious pictures of Christ, by which means to represent him fine and glorious. But what doth he speak of himself in Psal. xxii. 6. 'I am a worm and no man.' He was brought to that low condition, that he was of no esteem, of no reputation. But if we could have had a sight of him, how comely would he have been? Why, 'he had neither form nor comeliness' in his outward appearance; 'that when we should see him we should desire him,' Isa. liii. 2. Wherein then consists the dignity of his person? In two things, [1.] In the glory of his divine nature. [2.] In the immeasurable fulness of his human nature with grace.

[1.] In his divine glory, Phil. ii. 6. 'Who was in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal with God.' Here is his glory. Also in John i. 14. 'We behold his glory.' Wherein consists that glory? 'The glory of the only begotten of the Father.'

If you ask us, 'What is our beloved more than another beloved?' What is there in Christ, that our souls are sick of love for him, breathe and pant after the enjoyment of him, and that continually? It is because we have seen his glory, who is God blessed for ever.

[2.] It consists in the immeasurable, unspeakable fulness of grace that was given to his human nature. It is what I have as much thought of as any one thing, concerning the

immeasurable fulness of grace which is in the human nature of Christ. So saith the apostle, John iii. 34. 'That God gave not the Spirit unto him by measure.' How by measure? 'To every one of us is grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ;' Eph. iv. 7. We have every one of us a measure; but it is given to him without a measure. There is an immeasurable fulness of grace in the human nature of Christ, which we are partakers of; 'for of his fulness we all receive and grace for grace.' It is an infinity in the divine nature, transferred into the human nature of Christ, and through him communicated unto our souls. From the eternal fountain of the divine nature, through the human nature of Christ, which hath an immeasurable fulness, as the head of the church, it is, I say, transfused to all his members. In this he is 'fairer than the children of men.'

(2.) He is so in the excellency of his work. The work that Christ did, was such as none ever did or could do, but only he himself. It is true, 'the law was given by Moses; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ;' John i. 17. Could not the law give grace, and do this business, so as to bring in an everlasting righteousness, pardon of sin, save the soul, make us accepted with God? No. Rom. viii. 3. 'What the law could not do, that God, sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, did.' But there were sacrifices of the law; when men had sinned, they could make atonement: no, 'sacrifice and burnt-offerings thou wouldest not; then said I, Lo, I come to do thy will;' Psal. xl. 8. But would there not be righteousness, if men observe the law and follow after it? Alas! they could not obtain it, Rom. x. 3, 4. 'For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.' So that neither the deeds of the law, nor the sacrifices of the law, nor the righteousness of the law, will do; 'the redemption of our souls is precious,' and would have ceased for ever, if Christ had not been found to undertake this work. When there was but a book to be opened of revelations for the church, none was found worthy to open it, until Christ prevailed, Rev. v. 2, &c. If there could be no new revelations made but only by Christ, much less could any in heaven or earth redeem the souls of men from death and hell, bring them into favour with God, and work out eternal redemption for them.

(3.) He is more excellent than all the sons of men, in the revelation he has made of the will of God. Christ has made such a revelation of the will, love, and grace of God, as none of the children of men ever saw before.

These are the things we ought to consider in Christ, as he is fairer than the children of men; in the dignity of his person, in the excellency of his work, and in the glory of his revelation.

You will say, why should we consider Christ in these his incomparable excellencies? I answer, [1.] That our hearts be not taken away, nor engrossed by the children of men, and what belongs unto them, their glory, their honours, their lusts, their pleasures, their righteousness. If we would not have our hearts allured, and drawn off with them, the way is, to exercise our faith upon the incomparable excellencies of the Lord Jesus Christ. Can the world be to us an all-sufficient God, and a great reward? Can the world pardon our sins, save our souls, deliver us from wrath to come, reveal to us the mystery of truth from the bosom of the Father? Can it make known the mind of God? communicate grace and love to us? If it cannot, then let us dwell in our thoughts on him, who is fairer than the children of men.

[2.] The consideration of these excellencies in Christ, is exceedingly suited to increase faith and love in us. They are the proper objects in Christ of these graces. What is it we believe and love? Do not we believe in Christ, as the Son of God, as God-man in one person? Do not we love him, as he is so? Do not we believe he hath made atonement for us? And do not we believe and love the excellency of his work? Then the exercise of our thoughts upon these things, is the way to increase faith and love in us. And the great reason why we are so weak in our faith, and so cold in our love, is, because we exercise our souls no more to immediate direct thoughts upon Christ, and his excellencies. We live by reflex considerations upon the benefits of Christ; but if we could exercise our souls more directly, in daily thoughts of Christ in faith and love, we should increase more in these graces, and be more transformed into his likeness; 'beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image,' &c. 2 Cor. iii. 18. It is not such a cheap thing to be a Christian as most imagine. What wandering

thoughts have the generality of Christians about Christ, and never once examine into their thoughts, whether they have any spiritual acquaintance with him or no?

II. The second thing to consider in the words is, The endowment of Christ in his human nature, for the discharge of this great office and work, which is here ascribed unto him in this psalm, set forth by grace being poured into his lips.

And there are three things that may be observed: 1. The nature of this endowment; and that is, grace. 2. The manner of its communication, and that is, poured; it is not dropped, but poured. 3. The seat of it being communicated, grace is poured into his lips.

1. The nature of this endowment; it is grace.

Grace in Scripture is taken two ways: (1.) For inherent grace and holiness, or the graces of the Spirit. Things that are bestowed upon men, and wrought in them, they are called grace, the same as the principle of spiritual life. (2.) Grace is taken externally for favour and love. 'We are saved by grace,' i. e. by the free favour of God.

It is here taken in the first sense, for the internal principle of grace and holiness; this was poured into the lips of Christ. Grace, in the second sense, is also mentioned in the last clause of the verse, 'therefore God has blessed thee for ever.'

And we may observe, in reference to the seat of it, that it hath particular respect unto the prophetic office of Christ, whereby he discharged his duty in the revelation of the will of God. Christ did manifest and evidence grace in all he did and said in this world, as the lips are the way of manifesting the mind.

It is the first of these things I shall chiefly discourse on, viz. The endowment that renders the human nature of Christ so exceedingly desirable and glorious, is grace.

That which rendered Christ so beautiful, so desirable, and glorious, was not secular wisdom, though there was in him the greatest fulness of all wisdom; it was not the pomp, the greatness, the glory of the world, outward ornaments, or any thing that men esteem; no, it was that which men hate and persecute, that rendered Christ so beautiful and glorious. God did not endow Christ with riches; no, he

was poor, so poor, that he had not where to lay his head; nor with bodily appearance, for he was a worm, and no man. But, saith God, I will render him glorious. How? He shall be full of grace. We saw his glory as of the only begotten Son of the Father. We saw it, say they; the world saw nothing but a poor man, whom they despised; but we saw his glory. And what was that glory? 'He was full of grace;' John i. 14. Even the glory of Jesus Christ consists in grace.

And why doth this glory of Christ consist in grace? For these three ends:

(1.) Because in this internal grace consists the reparation of the image of God. All the glory that God thought meet to communicate to his creature man (and it was unspeakable, and all he designed him for), was to make him in his own image and likeness. This was the glory God intended; every thing else doth but follow it. Now, we left this image, and became as like the devil, as if we had been begotten by him; John viii. 44. 'We are the children of the devil, he is our father;' we are a generation of vipers, the seed of the serpent by nature. But it is grace that doth repair, and renew this image of God. It is grace that makes a representation of God unto us, and therefore doth Christ's glory consist in grace. The apostle tells us so, 2 Cor. iv. 6. 'We behold the glory of God in the face of Christ.' How is that? Why, in that abounding grace that was in Christ, there is made such a representation of God, that there we may see his likeness. It is the human nature of Christ that makes the great representation of God, because he hath all that which is the image and likeness of God, viz. grace, in the fulness of it in him.

(2.) This grace is the glory of Christ, because it is that which inclines the heart of Jesus Christ unto all that goodness and kindness that he hath shewed unto us. Whence was it that Jesus Christ loved us so, as to lay down his life for us? Whence does he continue to have compassion on us, even when we were ignorant, and wandered out of the way? It is from that abounding, unspeakable, heavenly love that was in his heart and soul, that inclined him to it. The more grace we have, the more we have of love, compassion and delight in doing the will of God. But there was that

abundance in Christ that inclined him to do all this good for us, to live, to die, to intercede for us. This makes Christ very beautiful and glorious to the eye of faith.

(3.) It is the glory of Christ, as he is the great example and pattern, whereunto we ought to labour after a conformity. When we had lost all, and wandered up and down, it was not enough that we should have a rule set us, but we must moreover have a pattern to follow; we must be like unto Christ. And there is an unconquerable desire implanted in the heart of every believer in the world, to be like unto Jesus Christ, because God hath, in the way of an ordinance, appointed him to be our pattern. And we are but trifling Christians, and a dishonour to our profession, if we make not this the design of our souls continually, that we may be in the world as Christ was; that the same mind may be in us, that was in him; Phil. ii. 5. The same meekness, humility, self-denial, faith, love, patience, that was in him.

To close, in a way of use; If this internal grace and holiness was that wherein Christ was fairer than the children of men, because grace was poured into his lips; then,

1. Let us learn to esteem it above all other things. That which rendered Christ beautiful, will render us so; not in the eyes of the world; no, it did not render Christ so to the world. The more he abounded in grace, the more they despised him. But it renders us beautiful in the sight of God, and all the holy angels, and in the judgment of all believers upon earth. If we be but like unto Christ in any measure, it will render us fair, beautiful, desirable in the eyes of all that have eyes to see, and hearts to discern it.

2. Let us not value so much the lustre, the splendour, and glory that earthly men have in earthly things, in their riches, power, honour, and the like. How apt are we to fret ourselves sometimes at the thoughts of these things, and think they have a peculiar happiness; that they are so great and glorious as they appear, and make a shew of: but God knows, there is nothing in them but what is the object of his contempt, and of all the saints and angels, and will be so to all eternity.

SERMON IX.*

Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty.—Psal. xlv. 3.

IN the second verse, we have a description of the person of Christ, and of the ground of God's blessing, and accepting of him in his work; the psalm having a double design; first, To shew the glory of Christ in his kingly office. Secondly, To shew the mutual love that is between Christ and his church.

This third verse sets forth his entering upon the first part of his work, and is spoken by the way of encouragement unto Christ in the name of God the Father, to undertake his office, and to go through with it. 'Gird thy sword,' saith he, 'upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty.'

There are three things in the words :

I. The work that is proposed unto Jesus Christ, or rather his preparation for his work; 'Gird thy sword upon thy thigh.'

II. The manner how he should go through this work; 'With thy glory and thy majesty.' And that which I shall particularly enlarge on.

III. The appellation that is here given to Christ, which is, most Mighty. He is most mighty in the execution of his office, which he is exalted unto.

I. We have Christ's preparation for his work, 'Gird thy sword on thy thigh.' Consider two things: 1. What is the sword of Christ; 2. What is meant by girding this sword upon his thigh.

1. The sword of Christ is the word of God; so it is called, 'the sword of the Spirit,' which is the word of God. Eph. vi. 17. The Spirit being the great immediate agent, whereby Christ administers his kingdom. That which is the sword of the Spirit, is the sword of Christ. And therefore, where Christ is described in his kingdom, it is said,

* This sermon was preached at Stadham, June 21, 1674.

that 'he hath a sword proceeding out of his mouth;' Rev. i. 16. which, in another place is called 'the rod of his mouth;' Isa. xi. 4. It is the word of God, the great instrument of Christ in managing of his kingdom, that is called here his sword.

2. Concerning this, it is said, 'gird thy sword upon thy thigh.' The girding of the sword upon the thigh, is the putting of it into readiness for use. When David was going up against Nabal, he said unto his men, 1 Sam. xxv. 13. 'Gird ye on every man his sword.' Wherefore Christ's girding his sword upon his thigh, is the disposing of the word into the ordinances of the gospel, where it may be ready for use. It hath respect unto the time when he ascended on high, and sent forth his word for the setting up of his kingdom. Then he put his word in readiness to effect the great designs of his love and grace, 'when he gave some to be apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers;' Eph. iv. 11. He furnished men with gifts and abilities to dispense this word, unto the ends of his kingdom.

II. The manner of going through his work, is, 'with thy glory and with thy majesty.' The glory and majesty of Christ are his power and authority. And so it is prophesied of as an encouragement unto the Lord Christ, that he should clothe his word with power and authority for the ends of setting up his kingdom, the edification of his church, and the preservation of it in the world.

These things I speak in a general way; I shall now more particularly address myself,

III. To the appellation that is here given unto Christ, O most mighty, גִּבּוֹר גִּבּוֹר, one that prevails in every thing he takes in hand.

Observe from hence, that the Lord Jesus Christ, as king of the church, is endowed with a mighty power for the accomplishing of all the designs and ends of this rule and kingdom. It is said of him, Psal. lxxxix. 19. 'God hath laid help upon one that is mighty.' It is spoken there primarily of David, 'I have found David my servant.' But what could poor David do? one taken from the sheepfold? It was not a laying help therefore upon David that was mighty, absolutely speaking, but a putting strength into

him. But David was a type of Christ, and to him must the passage be referred; he is the mighty One. Also Isa. lxiii. 1. describing of Christ in his kingdom, saith, 'It is I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.' And again, in Psal. xxiv. 7, &c. there is a description of his ascension into heaven; the gates and everlasting doors being lifted up, that he, the King of glory, may enter in: the question being asked, 'Who is this King of glory?' saith he, 'The Lord, strong and mighty.' It is a property every where ascribed unto Jesus Christ, that he is mighty.

Here we may inquire, 1. Whence Christ is thus mighty for the execution of his kingly office; and, 2. To what ends he doth put forth this might and power.

1. Whence is Christ thus mighty? Christ is mighty upon two accounts:

(1.) From the omnipotent power of his divine nature, which is the principle of his mighty operations in the union of his person. So the prophet declares, Isa. ix. 6. 'Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given:' and how shall he be called? 'Wonderful Counsellor, The mighty God.' This child that is born unto us, this son that is given unto us, his name shall be, that is, he really is, The mighty God; Why so? because of the union of the divine nature, with the human in the same person, whereby the same person becomes a child born, and also the mighty God.

(2.) He is mighty, from the authority and power that was communicated and given unto him, by the Father, as mediator, for the accomplishing of his whole work. Two things concur to make one legally mighty to proper ends; first, Strength and power. Secondly, Authority. Where there is strength and power, and no authority, it is force. And where there is authority, but no strength or power, that authority will be void. Christ had strength and power as the mighty God; and he hath authority too, as all power is communicated to him by God the Father, as may be seen in Matt. xxviii. 18. Eph. i. 20—22. and many other places.

But it will be objected, if Christ be the mighty God by nature, how comes it to pass, that he should have power and authority given unto him; God hath given unto him might and dominion, far above all principalities, &c.

I answer, Christ, as his power is given to him, is consi-

dered, not absolutely as God, nor absolutely as man ; but as God-man, mediator, one that mediates between God and man : and so his power to erect his kingdom, is given him of his Father.

2. The second inquiry, is, Unto what ends doth the Lord Jesus put forth this mighty power wherewith he is endowed? I answer, to these five ends: (1.) Unto the erecting of his kingdom, or church in the world; (2.) To the preservation of it; (3.) To the subduing of his enemies; (4.) To the raising of the dead; (5.) In the judging of all flesh, and distributing of eternal rewards and punishments. All which are acts of mighty power.

(1.) Jesus Christ puts forth this mighty power in erecting and building of his church. In Matt. xvi. 18. our Lord saith, 'I will build my church;' and the apostle, in Heb. iii. 3, 4. shews, that it was an act of divine power, to build this church of God, 'He that built all things is God.' No one could build a church in all ages, but God himself. And if we were able to take a view how Jesus Christ first built his church in the world, we should learn not to distrust his power in any thing he had afterward to do. There was a combination of hell, and of all the power of the world, against the interest of Christ and the gospel. The concurring suffrage of mankind, wise and unwise, learned and unlearned, Jew and Greek, influenced by their interest, by all that was dear unto them, set themselves in a combination against Christ's building of his kingdom. He employed against all this force a few poor men, unlearned, unskilful, and gives into their hands, only the sword of the Spirit, the word of God; furnishes them only with gifts, and abilities for the dispensing of the word, which was 'his girding of his sword upon his thigh:' he set these poor men to work; and clothing them with his glory and majesty, they make havoc in the devil's kingdom, and destroy it by degrees, until they root it out of the earth. It was then an act of mighty power in Christ, to build his kingdom and church.

(2.) Christ puts forth this mighty power, in the preserving of his church, being so founded, and built on him. It is that which he expresses, Isa. xxvii. 3. 'I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.' The church being built, is

not able to stand of itself; for unto the end of time, the gates of hell and the power of the world shall be engaged against it. But, saith he, 'I will keep it, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.' There is a carnal church in the world, or a wordly church; and how is that kept? by force, laws, and power of men, who have wrapped up their secular interest in the preserving of it, and they will fight for their kingdom. On the contrary, the Lord Jesus Christ hath a spiritual church, of them that believe in him; they also are preserved, and by what means? by a secret emanation of mighty power from Jesus Christ. There hath not been any age in the world since the ascension of Christ, but there hath been an emanation, or putting forth of this mighty power of Christ in preserving of this church. He preserved a people under the whole apostacy of antichrist. Had there been none left in the earth to fear him, and believe in him, all the promises of God to him had come to an end. But he did secretly, by his mighty power, preserve a people to himself in the midst of all the defection of antichrist. And he doth so at this day in the midst of the new defection made to antichrist: for, in former days, the world fell off to antichrist by superstition and idolatry; they are now falling off to him by profaneness and atheism: yet Jesus Christ, by his mighty power under both, or by a secret exertion of his power, preserves his church through all, and carries them as safe through the new opposition, as he did through the old.

(3.) He puts forth his power, for the subduing and conquering of his and his church's enemies.

What enemies has Christ? What enemies has the church? As many as there are devils in hell, and men and women in the world, that are of the seed of the serpent. But I may reduce all the enmity to the interest of Christ upon earth, to these four heads: [1.] Satan; [2.] The world; [3.] Sin; [4.] Death. Christ is most mighty in conquering all these enemies.

[1.] He puts forth his mighty power in conquering of Satan. This was the first word that was spoken of him in the world, in Gen. iii. 15. 'I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.' The

first discovery God made to his creatures concerning the incarnation of his Son, was in this, that he would destroy Satan; and so the Holy Ghost tells us he hath done, Col. ii. 15. 'He spoiled principalities and powers,' and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in his cross.' These words, 'He spoiled principalities and powers,' are an exposition of the former promise in Genesis, that 'the seed of the woman,' Jesus Christ, 'should break the serpent's head.' How should he do it? Why, in spoiling principalities and powers, and triumphing over them openly in his cross. So he saith, in Heb. ii. 14. 'That through death he destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.' He did not destroy him as to his being, but as to his power and authority. Hence, first, The devil hath a limited power only remaining, such as shall never prejudice the eternal interest of the church. And, secondly, He is reserved unto eternal destruction by this mighty power of Christ.

[2.] The second enemy of Christ is the world; and that may be considered either in the men of it, or in the power of it.

In the men of it. The Lord Christ puts forth his mighty power to deal with, and subdue all the men of the world, that rise up in opposition against him. Whatever success they may seem to have, they are all made his footstool. 'He shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel;' Psal. ii. 9. And you have him twice or thrice described in the Revelations, as going forth in his mighty power, for the subduing of all his adversaries. See Rev. xix. 11—21.

And this must be, for he shall subdue all the authority in the world; not only the persons of men, but all the power, and all the authority which is set up against him, or exercised against his interest. 1 Cor. xv. 24, 25. 'When he shall have put down all rule, and all authority and power. For he must reign until he hath put all his enemies under his feet.' There is a suspension of the issue of all things, until Christ hath thus put down all that opposeth him and his interest. But there is an expectation in heaven, and in earth, in the whole creation; all are waiting, as if one single person, for the putting forth this mighty power of Christ, for

the subduing of all unto him; for the end will not be till then. Whatever we endure, we must be contented with it, whatsoever we suffer, the end must not be till all his enemies be made his footstool, and there be nothing to stand up against him, who is most mighty.

[3.] Sin in his people, is another enemy of Christ. Sin, as it is in men by nature, is that which gives life and efficacy to all the enmity that is acted against him; and as it remains even in believers themselves, it doth act a great enmity against Christ. How come we then to be freed from it? How comes it to be subdued? The apostle, in Rom. vii. gives an account of the great contest, and conflict that believers have with the remainder of sin in them, that makes them cry out for deliverance from it, ver. 24, 25. It is a sudden breaking forth of the apostle there, when he was describing the law of sin; for he cries out, 'O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me,' &c. But he as suddenly takes up, 'I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.' Through the power of Christ this enemy, sin, shall be subdued. Therefore, chap. vi. 14. it is said, 'Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace.' If you come under grace, or under the rule of Christ, sin shall not have dominion over you. What is the reason of it? Where is the consequence of the argument? Because sin is one great enemy of Christ, and he will certainly conquer it.

[4.] Death is another enemy. It is the last enemy, 1 Cor. xv. 25, 26. 'He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet; the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.' And, in ver. 54. he tells us, that 'death is swallowed up in victory;' a conquest is obtained over it. It is the last enemy, because, until the consummation of all things, we shall be subject to its power; but that shall also come under the feet of Christ, when we shall die no more.

This is the third end wherefore Christ puts forth this mighty, or exceeding greatness of his power, namely, for the subduing of his enemies.

(4.) The fourth end for which Christ puts forth the greatness of his power, is for the raising up all his church from the dead: Phil. iii. 20, 21. 'Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for a Saviour, the

Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.' The mighty power of Christ reaches thus far, that the dead shall be raised thereby: Yes, our vile body shall; the body of our humiliation, that is, the body, as it is fallen into corruption, into a vile estate, though it come to worms and dust, yet he shall revive it by the exceeding greatness of his power. He shall raise the bodies of his people. The privilege of believers in that day, will be, that they shall be first raised, and they shall be peculiarly raised, by the power of Christ, as mediator. Their bodies shall be raised in conformity to his glorious body, when others shall be raised after them, by the mere divine power of Christ, and raised with all their own vileness upon them.

(5.) And lastly, to mention no more, The mighty power of Christ is put forth in judging of all the world, and distributing to them rewards of bliss, or woe, that shall abide to all eternity, Matt. xxv. 31—46.

Thus you see, why the Holy Ghost, by the psalmist, calls Christ here the mighty One, one that will mightily prevail in every thing. It is because of his divine power, he is the mighty God; because of his mediatorial authority; there is committed unto him all power in heaven and in earth. He doth put forth this power for the erecting of his church, for its preservation, for the subduing of his enemies, in the raising of the dead, and distributing rewards and punishments.

SERMON X.*

THE USE AND ADVANTAGE OF FAITH IN A TIME OF PUBLIC CALAMITY.

But the just shall live by his faith.—HAB. ii. 4.

THIS is the first time these words are mentioned in the Scripture, but they are three times quoted by the apostle Paul; he preached as it were thrice upon them. Rom. i. 17. Gal. iii. 11. Heb. x. 38. For it is full of heavenly matter, and is made use of by the apostle to several purposes. I know no one text that hath been more preached upon, or more written upon by them who have treated of the life of faith; how the just live the life of justification; and how they live the life of sanctification, the life of consolation, the life of peace, the life of joy, the life of obedience, &c. My design is quite of another nature, and is that which falls in with the design of the prophet in the first use of the words, as we shall presently see.

You know, that for many years, upon all these occasions, without failing, I have been warning of you continually of an approaching calamitous time, and considering the sins that have been the causes of it. The day is with the Lord, the year, and month I know not; but I have told you, 'That judgment will begin at the house of God;' that in the latter days of the church, 'perilous times will come;' that God seems to 'have hardened our hearts from his fear;' and caused us 'to err from his way;' and that none knows what 'the power of his wrath will be.' In all these things I have foretold you of perilous, distressing, calamitous times; and in all men's apprehensions, they now lie at the door, and are entering in upon us. Now I must change my design; and my present work will be both upon this, and, if I live, upon some other occasions, to shew how we ought to deport ourselves in and under the approaches of distressing calamities

* This sermon was preached April 9, 1680.

that are coming upon us, and may reach, it may be, up to the very neck.

What this text teaches us is, That in the approaches of overwhelming calamities, and in the view of them, we ought, in a peculiar manner, to live by faith. That is the meaning of the place.

And that this is our duty, appears from this passage, and the context. For the prophet had received a vision, a dreadful vision from God, of the coming in of the Chaldeans, and of the destruction they would bring upon the church, and upon all the land, in the foregoing chapter. Having received this vision, he considers what is his own duty, and what is the duty of the church, in the approaches of this distressing calamitous season. Why, saith he, ver. 1. 'I will stand upon my watch and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd.' God will reprove me; there will be great arguings between God and my soul: I know my own guilt and sin, and I would be in a readiness to have something to answer God when I am reprov'd, something to betake myself unto. The answer, saith he, I will betake myself unto is this, 'The just shall live by his faith.' Two things are here included.

First, saith he, I will betake myself (as the apostle makes use of it) unto 'Jesus Christ for righteousness.' I have nothing else to answer God, when I am reprov'd.

Secondly, I will pass through all these terrible and dreadful dispensations of providence that are coming upon me, by living the life of faith: a peculiar way of living, as we shall presently see. When the flood was coming upon the world, 'Noah was a preacher of righteousness;' 2 Pet. ii. 5. What righteousness did Noah preach? Why, that righteousness whereof he himself was partaker, 'for he became an heir of the righteousness which is by faith;' Heb. xi. 7. When the flood was coming, Noah preached the righteousness of faith to the world, that they might escape, if they would attend unto it; but it was rejected by them. Wherefore, I say, in the approach of a calamitous season, there is in an especial way and manner, a living by faith required of us.

But you will say, What is a calamitous season? or when do you esteem a season calamitous?

I will give you two things for the description of such a season as I judge to be manifestly calamitous.

1. When it exceeds the bounds of affliction, or when the dispensations of God's anger in it cannot be reduced to the head of affliction; Ezek. xxi. 9, 10, 13. 'Son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus saith the Lord; say, A sword, a sword is sharpened, and also furbished. It is sharpened to make a sore slaughter; it is furbished that it may glitter. Should we then make mirth? It contemneth the rod of my son, as every tree. Because it is a trial, and what if the sword contemn even the rod?' The rod comprises all affliction; but God will bring a sword, a judgment that shall not be reducible to the head of affliction; it shall contemn it. Now, I say, let it be what it will, when a calamity doth befall a people, or the church of God, that cannot be reduced to the head of affliction, but that every one shall find there is anger, judgment, wrath, in it; then it is a distressing time.

2. When judgments fall promiscuously upon all sorts of persons, and make no distinction, then I take it to be a distressing time; for they strip men of the comforts they cherish in their own minds. Job. ix. 22, 23. 'This is one thing, therefore I said it, he destroyeth the perfect and the wicked.' What doth God always do so? Doth he never make a distinction about judgments? Yes, sometimes; 'but if the scourge slay suddenly, he will laugh at the trial of the innocent.' When God brings a scourge, or a sword that shall slay promiscuously, that shall seize upon, destroy and devour the innocent, so that they shall not escape, he will be as one that standeth by, rejoicing, to see how they carry themselves under their trial.

Now this is enough to give satisfaction, what I intend by a distressing calamitous time: it cannot be reduced to the head of affliction; and it slayeth suddenly and promiscuously, the perfect and the wicked; and it may be, 'the good figs shall go first into captivity.' I am not much otherwise minded; and God may have mercy for them in that dispensation.

I shall now shew you these two things:

I. How we shall live by faith; how we should deport ourselves; what faith will do in such a season; what our duty

is under the approach of these calamitous, distressing times that are coming upon us.

II. I shall shew you, how faith doth, and will carry it under other perplexities that we have upon us, that we either feel or fear.

1. Faith will guide and act the soul under the approach of these distressing calamities, in these following things.

(1.) It will give the soul a reverential fear of God in his judgments. So it did unto the saints of old; Heb. xi. 7. 'By faith Noah, being warned of God,' ἐνλαβηθεὶς, 'moved with a reverential fear.' There is no man that is not stout-hearted, and far from righteousness, but is, upon God's warning, moved with a reverential fear of God in his judgments. It was so with David, Psal. cxix. 120. 'My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.' He was not afraid as to outward judgments, but under them his flesh trembled with a reverential fear of God. And so was it with the prophet Habakkuk, upon the vision he had of the approach of the Chaldeans, chap. iii. 16. 'When I heard, my belly trembled, and my lips quivered at the voice; rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops.' He had a reverential fear of God in his judgments working upon him. According to my best observation of things in this state wherein we are, the generality of people may be distributed under these three heads: [1.] There are some that are indeed really afraid of approaching judgments; they do not know how soon they will reach unto themselves, their persons, their families, their relations, their estates, all that they have laboured for, and exerted their utmost care and industry about in the world; the flood lies at the door ready to carry all before it; they fear every day. Some men die also for fear of dying; they are poor for fear of poverty; they will part with nothing, because they fear they must part with all. A strange contradiction of spirit! Now this is not the work of faith. So far as it prevails upon any of our spirits, God will rebuke us for it; Isa. li. 12, 13. 'Who art thou that shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy maker, and hast feared continually

every day, because of the fury of the oppressor?' chap. viii. 13. 'and hath not sanctified the Lord in thy heart, nor made him thy fear?' Who art thou? God hates this sinful fear; it is an abomination unto him. This is nothing but the fear of self; we will keep all warm about us, while we are in this world, and are afraid of the besom of destruction. [2.] There are others who utterly despise these things; take no notice of them; who do not think any such distressing calamity shall come upon them; if it does, they shall deal well enough with it. Isa. xxviii. 14, 15. 'They have made a covenant with death, and a league with hell, and say, when the overflowing scourge passes through, it shall not come near them.' They have a thousand ways to disinterest themselves from any thing of the most distressing calamity, that is coming over the world. This swallows up the generality of mankind, and is that which the prophet doth so reflect upon. Isa. xxvi. 11. 'When thy hand is lifted up, they will not see; but they shall see, and be ashamed for their envy at thy people, and the fire of thine adversaries shall devour them.' [3.] The other sort is mentioned in Judges v. 6. and may be called way-side men, idle, discursive men, that have nothing else to do, but to walk up and down and talk, and are not concerned with a reverence of God and his judgments; they talk of them as if there was no God in heaven to regard them, or as if they had no concernment with him. If we have the least true saving faith in exercise, it will cast this cursed frame out of our hearts, it will be daily working it out of our souls, and will bring us to that which I told you is its proper work. 'God,' saith the psalmist, Psal. ix. 16. 'is known by the judgment which he executes.' And what of God, is principally known in the judgments which he executes in the world, is but little considered. That which God makes known of himself in a peculiar manner in these dreadful dispensations is, his majesty, his holiness, and his power.

God will appear to be awfully majestic and wonderfully glorious in such dispensations. He speaks of himself upon that occasion; Isa. ii. 19—21. 'In that day shall a man cast away his idols of silver, and idols of gold, to the moles, and to the bats; to go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of

his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth.' If we have the light of faith to let it in, we shall see a majesty and glory in God's actings, even in his public and distressing judgments; such a greatness, and a glory, that the soul will be constrained to bow down before him.

God doth in his judgments also manifest his holiness, of which we shall speak afterward. So Rev. xv. 4. 'Who will not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy.' How doth this appear? 'For thy judgments are made manifest.' When God makes his judgments manifest, his holiness will appear. And so, when Habakkuk came to plead with God about that great judgment of the Chaldeans, which gave occasion to my text, he cries out, 'O Lord my God, my Holy One, thou art of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.'

God in them also glorifies himself in his power. He sets up one, and pulleth down another, and doth whatsoever he pleases; herein he manifestly shews his sovereign power.

Now, to live by faith, is to cast out all those cursed frames before mentioned, and to bring this frame into your hearts, as the foundation of all that follows, namely, that you have a reverential fear of the majesty, the holiness, and the power of God, in all his judgments. And without this, we shall not please God in any thing we do. These are the true sayings of God. If there be another frame in us, this dispensation will pierce to the very soul before it be over: that is the first thing.

(2.) Where faith hath filled the soul with a reverential fear of God, its first work will be to put the soul upon preparing and providing an ark for itself: so it was in the great example of our faith before mentioned. Noah, being moved by fear, 'prepared an ark,' wherein he saved himself and his family. Let men pretend what they will, unless they are under a strange careless stupidity and security (which I fear is upon the generality of professors), they cannot, in such a season as this, but be preparing some reserve for themselves. What shall we do when this comes upon us? They have some predominant reserve. 'The rich man's wealth is his strong city;' Prov. xviii. 11. He may lose a great deal, but he will save enough for himself; so the strong man trusts to his strength, the wise man to his wis-

dom: one thing or other men prepare for themselves to be an ark against the storm comes; and those who do not so, they fluctuate up and down at uncertainties, hoping, that by one way and means or another, that they know not of, they shall be carried above all, have a good issue; that it shall not be as this or that prophet, or minister foretells, but that some way they shall escape. This is not to prepare an ark, which is the work of faith to do. And here I shall inquire into two things: [1.] What is this ark that is to be prepared; [2.] How we ought to enter into it, or how we are to make especial entrance into it, in reference to an approaching calamitous season. I say,

[1.] This ark is Jesus Christ; faith in him is necessary. In this chapter of my text, where inquiry is made, what shall be answered unto God, and what course shall be taken upon the coming in of the overflowing flood of the Chaldeans; this is the course to be taken, 'The just shall live by faith.' What is that? It is to seek for righteousness by Christ; to seek afresh for justification and life by Christ. There is no other way, no other ark; and he is described as this ark in that known place, Isa. xxxii. 2. 'And a man,' that is Jesus Christ, 'shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land:' that is the ark. I know not how to describe what I intend, by securing ourselves in the ark, like the description the prophet here gives, though in terms metaphorical. Likewise in Micah, v. 5. having given a promise of Christ, he adds, 'And this man shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land.' To betake ourselves to the ark, is to betake ourselves to the fountain of our peace. And so Psal. ii. 12. 'If God's wrath be kindled but a little,' how then? 'blessed are all they that' betake themselves unto him, 'trust in him;' in whom? in the Son; 'kiss the Son.' And surely, my brethren, the wrath of God is now kindled not a little, but a great deal, in all sorts and ways. The indications of the wrath of God are upon the spirits of men of all sorts, of professors, of the world, in their own persons, in all societies and relations. Where are we then to betake ourselves, but unto Christ? 'Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.'

[2.] But now, it would not have advantaged either Noah or his sons to have an ark prepared for them, unless they had a door to the ark. 'Make a door,' saith God to them, 'that ye may have entrance.' To obtain an interest in Christ is the general work of faith all our days. But how shall we be able now to make an especial entrance into this ark, suitable unto the state and condition wherein we are, and to approach a calamitous season, that is hastening upon us? I know but of one way for our making an especial entrance into this ark; Jesus Christ, in reference to such a season, which is, the solemn renovation of our covenant with God. This is the way that hath been used by the church from the foundation of the world, without any instance of the contrary; that when a storm was coming, if ever they were delivered from it, they entered into the ark by the renovation of their covenant with God: and seeing the end is certain, we are thus afresh to enter into this ark, Jesus Christ. It is no wisdom in civil things to remove a means, unless we have a better to substitute in the room of it; and it is so in spirituals. I desire all that fear God would stir up their hearts and thoughts, and offer to us (if they can) better way for this church, or any church to enter into the ark in the approach of a storm than this, and it shall be embraced. This church hath done so; though I begin to fear some look upon it as a very dead, sluggish commodity, they know not how to trade with. But do not mistake, you have no such thing lies by you in the sight of God this day. Do not despond, the day is approaching 'when others shall come,' (as it is in Zech. viii. 23.) 'and lay hold upon your skirts, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.' Some, blessed be God, and let his holy name be exalted, have far outgone us already, both in zeal and warmth, and courage, under a sense of engagements that are upon them. I look for no safety, no deliverance in the trials and afflictions that are coming upon the earth, but what is had in the way of believing. I value not those that are otherwise minded. Bless God who hath provided for you this door of entrance before the flood comes, and the rain falls; bless God, I say, for it, and make use of it, and be able to plead it with God: and let the Lord know that you have made your choice to be his, and are under his care,

and not under the protection of the world. I will not say you shall be saved temporally, but you shall be saved eternally; I cannot say you shall have peace with men, but you shall have peace with God; I cannot say you shall not lose your lives, but I will say you shall not lose your souls; and these are our principal concernments. Make good your entrance. A door made into the ark will do you no good, unless you enter in and make good your entrance at the door. How shall we make good our entrance into the ark, that we may have safety therein? If we are not at this work, we have no faith. Why, stand to your engagements, stand to the performance of those duties God requires at your hands, not only as there is no one thing required but what is a special duty of the New covenant; but stand to them now as those that have been your entrance into the ark, where God will give you all that rest that in this world you can be partakers of. This is another work of faith in the approach of a calamitous time.

(3.) If we live by faith, in the approach of a calamitous season, this will put us upon the search and examination of our own hearts, what accession we have made to the sins that have procured these judgments. This is that which faith (where it is in any measure sincere) will assuredly put us upon; and it is that God doth now in an especial manner call for. Now the sins which do, and have procured these judgments, are of two sorts. [1.] The open and flagitious sins of the world. [2.] The sins of churches and professors.

[1.] The open and flagitious sins of the world. The apostle reckons them up together, 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. 'Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.' He doth it again in Eph. v. 5, 6. 'For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.' He reckons them up also in Gal. v. 19, &c. 'The works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions,

heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, and such like.' There is a marvellous large copy written out of these texts in the nation at this day : every man may read an exposition of these things in the practice of multitudes. Some will say they bless God they are free from these things, and so they hope they have had no hand in procuring the judgments of God, that are coming upon the nation ; let them fall upon them and their interest, who are guilty of these provoking abominations, such as for which the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against their ungodliness. Why, it is well if they are not guilty of any of these sins. But the seed and foundation, even of all these sins, lie in our nature, if not in our persons ; and what irruptions they have made towards the provoking the eyes of God's glory, I know not. But suppose you have escaped these pollutions that are in the world through lust ;

[2.] There are other sins, sins of churches, and of professors, that in reference to Christ's mediatory kingdom, have as great influence for the procuring of judgments, as the worst sins of the world have for the procuring of judgments in his providential kingdom. I know a time when there was a storm, wherein a whole vessel, and all that were in it, were like to have been cast away ; but one Jonah, that was in the ship was the cause of the storm.

I shall just mention the judgment-procuring sins of churches and professors, which are reduced in Scripture to these four heads :

1st. Lukewarmness, which was the judgment-procuring sin of Laodicea.

2dly. Contenting ourselves in outward order and freedom from scandal, which was the judgment-procuring sin of Sardis, and will prove ruinous to the best churches in the world.

3dly. Want of love among ourselves, and division in churches.

4thly. Earthly mindedness, and love of the world, and conformity to it, that is found among the generality of professors.

SERMON XI.*

THE USE OF FAITH UNDER REPROACHES AND PERSECUTIONS.

The just shall live by his faith.—HAB. ii. 4.

You may remember, I spake occasionally from that of the psalmist, Psal. xcvi. 2. 'Clouds and darkness are round about him; righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne;' and from thence took occasion to consider what is our especial duty, when clouds and darkness are round about us, as they are at this day. And some of you know I have had a great persuasion, that the clouds that are gathering, will at least, in their first storm, fall upon the people of God. I must repeat it again and again; I have been warning you for some years, and telling you it would be so. The present frame wherewith I have to conflict in my own spirit, and that frame of spirit which I have observed in others, the state and condition of all churches and professors (so far as I know) is, they are gone into a dreadful security. I speak my heart, and what I know with reference unto our present state, and the cause of God; we are gone, I say, into a dismal security, which still confirms me, that the storm will come upon us, and that it will not be long ere we feel it. My design is, therefore, to shew you how we ought to behave ourselves under the perplexities and difficulties we are to conflict withal in this world. And I have not sat studying for things to speak, but only tell you the experience of my own heart, and what I am labouring after. I have already shewed you, what our duty is under the approach of these distressing calamitous times that are coming upon us; and what faith will do in such a season.

II. I am now in the second place to shew you, how faith will carry it under other perplexities, that either are present, or are coming upon us. And here I shall shew you,

* This sermon was preached April 30, 1680.

1. How we may live by faith, under all the reproaches and persecutions that do or may befall us, upon the account of that order and fellowship of the gospel, of that way of God's worship which we do profess.

2. How we may live by faith with reference unto the returning upon us of antichristian darkness and cruelty, if God shall suffer it so to be.

3. How we may live by faith under an apprehension of great and woful decays in churches, in church members, in professors of all sorts, and in the gradual withdrawals of the glory of God from us upon that account.

1. How may we live by faith with reference unto those reproaches, that scorn and contempt which are cast upon the ways of God, which we profess; that worship of God wherein we are engaged, and that order of the gospel that we do observe; with the persecutions that will attend us upon the account thereof. Truly I may say of it as the Jews said to Paul about Christianity, Acts xxviii. 22. 'As for this way, we know that it is everywhere spoken against.' The whole world seems to be combined, that the name of Israel, in this way, may no more to be had in remembrance. There are few that are concerned about these things, while it is well with them, their families, their relations, estates, inheritances; let the ways of God be reproached, what is that to them? They are not concerned in it. They cannot say as the psalmist doth, when he speaks in the person of Christ, Psal. lxxix. 9. 'The reproaches of them that have reproached thee, are fallen upon me.' Perhaps some of us are more sensible than others (or at least have reason so to be), of these reproaches that are continually cast upon the ways of God, seeing they are more particularly upon us. But those that are not concerned in this scorn and contempt, I would say three things.

First, What evidence have you, that you have a concern in God's glory? for these things are those whereby God is glorified in this world; and if you are not concerned, when there are so many reflections thrown upon it, pray consider what evidence you have in yourselves, of any concernment in the glory of God.

Secondly, What evidence have you that you have a love

to these things, that can hear them reproached, scorned, contemned, and never be moved at it? An honest good man would find himself concerned, if his wife or children were reproached with lies, and shameful things, because of his interest in them. But for them that can hear the ways of God reproached every day, and so long as it is well with them and theirs, are not concerned thereat, they can have no evidence that they have a love unto them. Nehemiah cries out upon such an occasion, chap. iv. 4. 'Hear, O our God, for we are despised; and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity.' God hath made special promises to such as are thus concerned, Zeph. iii. 18. 'I will gather them,' saith he. Whom will he gather? 'Them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden.' The solemn assemblies were reproached and mocked; and there were some of them (not all) to whom this reproach was a burden; 'These,' saith God, 'I will gather;' gather them under my gracious protection.

Thirdly, To add one word more; if you are not concerned in the reproaches that are cast upon the ways of God, persecution shall awaken you, and either make you concerned, or put an end unto all your profession.

Now the inquiry is, how, under these difficulties that we have to conflict withal, we shall glorify God, and pass through them without loss, unto our spiritual advantage.

The apostle, in the tenth chapter to the Hebrews, where he describes this very condition I have been speaking of, doth fully direct us. 'Ye endured,' saith he, 'a great fight of afflictions, partly while ye were made a gazing-stock, both by reproaches and afflictions, and partly whilst ye became companions of them that were so used; for ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods,' &c. ver. 32—34. But how shall we carry ourselves under this condition here described? 'Now,' saith he, ver. 38. 'the just shall live by faith.'

What is the work of faith in this condition, that we may glorify God, and carry it through to a good and comfortable issue to ourselves? call your own hearts to an account, and see how faith will work to give you support and

supply. I will tell you what I am labouring after in my own heart; and the Lord direct you to find out what will be more useful. What will faith do in such a case? I answer,

(1.) Faith will give us such an experience of the power, efficacy, sweetness, and benefit of gospel ordinances, and gospel worship, as shall cause us to despise all that the world can do in opposition unto us. Here I would cast my anchor, and exhort you, not to be confident of yourselves, for nothing else will keep and preserve you. An opinion, a well-grounded opinion and judgment, will not preserve you. Love to this or that man's ministry, will not preserve you; that you are able to dispute for your ways, will not preserve you; I can give you instances wherein they have all failed: resolutions, that if all men should leave them, you would not, are insufficient. Nothing can preserve you, but a sense and experience of the usefulness and sweetness of gospel administrations, according unto the mind of Jesus Christ. This faith alone can give you. 'Desire,' saith the apostle Peter, 'the sincere milk of the word;' 1 Pet. ii. 2. Desire, and labour to continue in the ordinances of the gospel, and the worship of God under the administration of the word. How? 'If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious;' ver. 3. otherwise you will never desire it. I should hope, that through the grace of God (and otherwise I do not hope it), I might yet continue, if indeed I could keep alive an experience, that in the dispensation of the word, I find a constant exercise of faith in God, delight in him, love to him; if I find, that I come to the word, as expecting to receive from God a sense of his love, and supply of his grace; I should then, I say, have good hope through grace, that ten thousand difficulties should never shake me in my continuance in this way. But if it be otherwise, there will be no continuance nor abiding. I mention these things, because, to the best observation, such a poor worm as I am can make, there is a mighty coldness and indifferency grown upon the spirits of men, in attending to the worship of God. There is not that life, spirit, courage, and delight in it, as hath been in times past; and if so, where it may end God only knows. This, I say, is the first thing that faith will do in this state, if we set it on work. If we would but labour to stir up faith to find those supplies of spiritual life and

strength in the ways of his worship and ordinances; if we would labour to overcome prejudices, and set ourselves against sloth and negligence, we should find ourselves as other men, and greatly set at liberty, as to what the world can do unto us. This is that which faith can do for us, in such a state of things; and this is that I would be labouring to bring my own heart unto.

(2.) Faith, in such a season, will bring the soul into such an experimental sense of the authority of Jesus Christ, as to make it despise all other things. I profess, if it were not for the authority of Christ, I would renounce all your meetings; they would have neither form nor comeliness in them, why they should be desired. But a deep respect unto the authority of Christ (unless our evil hearts are betrayed by unbelief and weakness), is that which will carry us through all that may befall us. Faith will work this double respect unto the authority of Christ:

[1.] As he is the great head and lawgiver of the church, who alone hath received all power from the Father, to institute all worship; and whoever imposes herein, usurps his crown and dignity. All power to institute spiritual worship is given unto Christ in heaven, and in earth. What then? 'Go, therefore,' saith he, 'and teach men to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you;' Matt. xxviii. 18. 20. Bring your souls to this exercise of faith, that these things we do, are commanded us by Christ, who is the sovereign Lord of our consciences, who hath sovereign authority over our souls. We must all appear before his judgment-seat, who will require of us, whether we have done and observed what he hath commanded us, or no? Do not only say these things, but labour greatly by faith to affect your consciences with this authority of Christ, and you will find that all other authorities will come to nothing, however you may suffer for it.

[2.] Faith respects the authority of Christ, as he is 'Lord of lords, and King of kings;' as he sits at the right hand of God, expecting all his enemies to become his footstool; as he hath not only a golden sceptre in his hand, 'a sceptre of righteousness,' wherewith he rules his church, but also an iron rod, to break all his enemies in pieces, like a potter's vessel. If faith exercises itself upon this power and authority of

Christ over his enemies, it will pour contempt upon all that the world can do. You cannot be carried before any magistrate, but Christ is there present greater than them all, who hath their breath in his hands, their lives, and their ways at his disposal, and can do what he pleases with them. Faith will bring in the presence of Christ in such a season; when otherwise your hearts would fail for fear, and you would be left unto your own wisdom, which is folly, and your own strength, which is but weakness. But if you have but faith working in the sense of this authority, it will make you like those well composed persons in the third of Daniel. Do not wonder at the greatness of their answer, and the composure of their spirits, when they looked on the fiery furnace on the one hand, and the fiery countenance of terrible majesty, on the other. ‘Know, that God,’ say they, ‘whom we serve, is able to deliver us out of thy hand; but if not,’ if God will not give us this present deliverance, ‘be it known unto thee, O king, we will not serve thy gods, nor worship thy golden image;’ ver. 17, 18. Faith will give us the same composure of spirit, and the same resolution; and with these things should we relieve ourselves under the worst that can befall us.

(3.) Faith, in such a case and condition, will bring to mind, and make effectual upon our souls, the examples of them that have gone before us, in giving the same testimony that we do, and in the sufferings that they underwent upon that account. When the apostle had told the believing Hebrews, that through all their trials, tribulations, and sufferings, they must live by faith, Heb. x. what encouragement, might they say, shall we receive by faith? Why, saith he, faith will bring to mind all the examples of them that have gone before you, that have suffered, and been afflicted, and distressed as you now are; which account takes up the whole eleventh chapter, and a good part of the beginning of the twelfth. It is a great thing when faith revives an example. Let us then by faith, carry in our minds the examples that are recorded in the Scripture. There is the example of Moses, the apostle gives it us; and it is an eminent instance; ‘He chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of

Egypt.' He, by the dark promise he had to live upon, endured the reproach of Christ. My brethren, take the prophets for an example of them that have suffered; and consider how the apostles have gone before us; but do not stop at them, for there is a greater than Moses and the prophets, and apostles; greater than even a cloud of witnesses, and that is no less a person than the Lord Jesus Christ. Heb. xii. 2. 'Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, and despised the shame.' He underwent the contradiction of sinners against himself, 'and is now set down at the right hand of God.' Faith calling to mind these great examples, would give us great support under all the trials we may be brought unto, and conflict with. Whither are we going? What do we hope for? We would be where Moses is, and where the prophets are; but how got they thither? They did not get thither through the increase of riches, and multiplying to themselves lordships in the world, but by sufferings, and the cross. Through many tribulations they entered into the kingdom of heaven.

(4.) Faith will receive in the supplies that Christ hath laid up for his people, in such a season. Christ hath made peculiar provision for suffering saints. And it consists in two things: First, In his special presence with them. He will be with them in the fire, and in the water. Secondly, In the communication of the sense of God's love unto them. 'Their tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope; and then the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given to us;' Rom. v. 3—5. Faith will bring all these things into the soul. But your minds must be spiritual, or you cannot put forth one act of faith for the bringing in this special provision that is laid up for suffering saints. And very few attain this spiritual frame, where faith fetches in these spiritual consolations Christ hath prepared for such souls. This is one way whereby we may live by faith in such a season. Search, therefore, and make inquiry in your entrance into troubles, what sense faith gives you of the love of God, to carry you through these difficulties.

(5.) It is faith alone that can relieve us with respect unto the recompense of reward. Moses suffered affliction

with the people of God, 'for he had respect to the recompense of reward;' Heb. xi. 20. The light and momentary afflictions which we undergo in this world, 'will work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;' 2 Cor. iv. 17. Who knows, but in a few days, some of us may be taken into that incomprehensible glory? where we shall eternally admire that ever we did put any manner of weight on things here below. Faith will fix your eye on the eternal recompense of reward. We have indeed a faith now at work, that fixes the minds of men upon this and that way of deliverance, and this and that strange accident; but we shall find that true faith will burn up all this as stubble.

(6.) And lastly, Faith will work by patience. The apostle tells us, 'we have need of patience, that after we have done the will of God, we may inherit the promises; and we are to be followers of them who through faith and patience, inherit the promises;' Heb. x. 36. vi. 12.

This is something of what I had to offer unto you, and I hope both seasonable and useful. However, it is what I can attain unto in these times of reproach, scorn, and contempt that is cast upon us, and persecutions approaching. I say faith will discover to us that efficacy, sweetness, power, and advantage in spiritual ordinances, as to make us willing to undergo any thing for them. Faith will bring our souls into such subjection unto the authority of Christ, as head of the church, and Lord over the whole creation, that we shall not be terrified with what man can do unto us. Faith will furnish us with examples of the saints of God, whom he hath helped, and assisted to go through sufferings, and who are now crowned and at rest in heaven. Faith will help us to keep our eye fixed, not upon the things of this world, but upon the eternal recompense of another world, and glory therein. And faith will also work by patience, when difficulties shall be multiplied upon us.

SERMON XII.*

THE USE OF FAITH, IF POPERY SHOULD RETURN UPON US.

The just shall live by his faith.—HAB. ii. 4.

OUR inquiry is, how we may live by faith, with reference unto these difficulties we have, or may have, to conflict with in the days wherein we live. The last head we spake to was, how we may live by faith in reference to all the reproaches and scornful contempts that are cast upon that way of worship, that order and fellowship of the gospel, which we cleave unto; and the persecutions which we may undergo upon that account. I now proceed.

2. The second difficulty that we have, or may have to conflict with, is the return of popery into this land. Half the talk of the world is upon this subject. I have nothing to say to some among ourselves; but I verily believe, that those who have the conduct of the papal antichristian affairs throughout the world, are endeavouring to bring it in upon us. I remember what holy Latimer said when he came to die. ‘Once I believed popery would never return into England, but,’ said he, ‘I find it was not faith, but fancy.’ I wish it prove not so with many of us. Now that which I am to speak unto is this, How we should live by faith, both in the prospect of the danger of it, and if it should come upon us. I shall name unto you a few things which I exercise myself with. If you have more supporting thoughts, and a better guidance of light, I pray God confirm it unto you.

(1.) The first thing I would exercise my thoughts upon, and that my faith rests in, in this case, is this, That there is a fixed determinate time in the counsel of God, when antichrist, and Babylon, and idolatry, and superstition, together with that profaneness of life which they have brought in,

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shall be destroyed. It is so fixed, that it shall not be altered, all the wisdom of men, all the sins of men, and all our unbelief, shall not hinder it a day; it shall assuredly come to pass in its appointed season. This time is reckoned up in Scripture by days, by months, by years; not that we should know the time of it, but that we should know the certainty of it; for if it hath but so many days, but so many months, and years, then it must have a certain period.

Under the Old Testament, we see this all along. Saith God to Abraham, 'Know of a surety, that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and they shall afflict them four hundred years, and then I will judge that nation;' Gen. xv. 14, 15. They knew not the beginning nor the ending of this four hundred years; but they knew, that at the end of them, it should be as God had said; 'and the self-same day it came to pass;' Exod. xii. 41. Likewise God threatens the Jews with a seventy years captivity in Babylon; 'And it shall come to pass,' saith God, 'when the seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation for their iniquity;' Jer. xxv. 11, 12. The church knew not when they began, or when they would end, but this they knew, that the same day they were accomplished, it should be as God had said; and so it was.

The fixing and computing of the time of the man of sin, of antichrist, by days, and months, and years, is to secure our faith in the punctual determination of the season, but not to satisfy our curiosity when the season should be. But the consideration of this, that there is such a time, or a determinate season, is a great foundation of faith and patience. Isa. lx. 22. 'A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation; I the Lord will hasten it in his time.' But if there be a fixed time for the accomplishment of this promise, you may ask, how can it then be hastened? Why, if you live in the exercise of faith and patience, it shall surprise you; it shall come when you do not think it will, nor expect it. 'I will hasten it in its time.' I will not bring it before its time, be ye never so patient, or impatient; but exercise faith and patience, and I will so order it, that it shall be a sweet surprisal unto you. And it is a means of patience; Hab. ii. 3. 'If the vision seem to tarry, wait for

it, for it will surely come.' When we know it will come, when we know there is such a determinate time, and that it will surely come, it is a great ground of patience to wait for it. This is a great consideration with me, and I leave it with you. Here I can exercise faith without fancy, or conjecture, that there is a certain determinate time in the counsel of God, wherein he will pour out all his judgments and plagues upon the antichristian world, until antichristianism be destroyed, and rooted out.

(2.) Another thing that comforts my heart is this ; It is no less glorious to suffer under the beast and the false prophet, than it was to suffer under the dragon. The book of the Revelation is chiefly made up of these two things, of the persecutions of the church, one by the dragon, and he is conquered ; the other by the beast and false prophet, and he shall be conquered. The dragon was the heathen power of the Roman empire ; and it was a glorious thing to suffer under that power. They that did so, are described, Rev. vii. 13—15. 'These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple ; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.' And of those that suffered under the beast and the false prophet, it is said, Rev. xii. 11. 'That by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony, they overcame him.' We account them great and glorious persons, who won the liberty of the gospel, and the Christian religion, by suffering against the pagan power ; and who destroyed all idolatry by their blood, starving and 'famishing all the gods of the heathen ;' Zeph. ii. 11. Never were men more glorious than they. These made up the 'Turba palmifera,' that is, the company who, with palms in their hands, and a new song in their mouths, give glory unto God ; Rev. vii. 9—12. I say, it is not less glorious to suffer under the beast and false prophet, the second persecuting power, that is, the papal antichristian power, than it was before under the pagan. This the church hath for many ages conflicted withal, and must continue to do so, until the time is come, when they shall have a perfect and complete conquest over this also. It is a glorious thing, and I would have you reckon

upon it as such. If a time of going into Smithfield should again come; if God shall call us to that fiery trial, or any other, whatever it may be, remember, that to suffer against antichrist, is as great and glorious, as to suffer against paganism.

(3.) Though our persons fall, our cause shall be as truly, certainly and infallibly victorious, as that Christ sits at the right hand of God. Among the heathens, men of courage did not value their own lives, so their cause was carried on. Now, however your persons, or my person, may fall in this trial; yet the cause, in which we are engaged, shall as surely conquer as Christ is alive; and shall prevail at last. Upon the first rise of the beast, it is said, Rev. xiii. 7. 'He made war with the saints, and overcame them.' The poor Waldenses looked upon themselves to be the people there prophesied of; and said, when they were under the butcheries of the papal power, 'We are the conquered people of God, but there shall come forth conquerors.' When going to die, they knew and believed their cause would conquer. And so, after antichrist hath conquered and prevailed over persons for a season, at length it will come to a final issue. 'They shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them; for they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful;' Rev. xvii. 14. The gospel shall be victorious. This is the third thing that greatly comforts and refreshes me, that if God should give me the honour, the strength, and grace to die in this cause, my cause shall be victorious, as sure as if I had the crown in my hand.

(4.) The judgments of God shall come upon the antichristian world, when they look not for them: when the kings of the earth do not look for them; yea, when believers themselves do not look for them, they shall come so suddenly. The Holy Ghost saith so expressly, Rev. xviii. 8. 'Her plagues shall come in one day, death and mourning, and famine, and she shall be utterly burnt with fire.' How is it possible, that she that is in the state and condition wherein she is, should have her plagues come upon her in one day? The reason is added, 'For strong is the Lord God that judgeth her.' Almighty strength shall be put forth for the accomplishing of it. And if this be not enough, the

seventeenth verse tells you, ‘that it shall come in one hour.’ And I do verily believe, that the destruction of this cursed antichristian state (of the head of it), will be brought about by none of those means we see, or know of; but that the strong Lord God shall break in upon her, and destroy her, by ways unknown to us. It may be to-morrow, it may be not these hundred years. She herself, when it is done, shall look for no such thing; ver. 7. ‘She glorified herself, and lived deliciously; for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow. Therefore her plagues shall come on her in one day.’ When she is boasting herself, destruction shall come; when the kings of the earth shall have no expectation of it; for they shall cry, ver. 16. ‘Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city; for in one hour so great riches is come to nought.’ And believers themselves will be such as the children of Israel in Egypt; when Moses came, they could not believe, because of the cruel bondage they were under: it is like the day wherein God’s judgments will come upon antichrist, the old enemies of Jesus Christ.

(5.) I would consider very much with myself, the greatness of the indignation of God against those that shall in the least comply with antichristianism, when it doth come upon us. In Rev. xiii. 11. there is mention of ‘a beast that had two horns, like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon (which I think is the pope), and he exercises all the power of the first beast;’ that is, he exercises a power answerable to the pagan power. And what then? ver. 16. ‘He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads; that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark.’ No matter what the mark is; but to receive any thing of him, is to receive his mark, either in our foreheads, where we shall shew it unto all the world; or in our right hands, more privately, where it may be shewn when opportunity serves. What then? Why, in chap. xiv. 6, 7. ‘I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven

and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.' When antichrist would bring his mark on the foreheads of the people, and into their hands, God, by his gospel, calls men from their false worship and idolatry. But what if they do not obey? The ninth and tenth verses tell us, 'A third angel followed, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receives his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God which is poured out, without mixture, into the cup of his indignation, and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb,' &c. Some will be apt to say, Let us make a fair composition, and use some compliance to put an end to these disputes. No, do it at your peril; God saith, you shall drink of the wine of his wrath, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation, and that for ever and ever. And I believe, with all my heart and soul, that this will be the portion of all the men and women in this nation, that shall comply with any return of antichristian idolatry among us; God shall pour out his indignation upon them.

(6.) Remember, that if the trial comes, it is a day of battle; and it is not for you, when you should just engage in a battle, to be considering of this or that way, or contrivance to escape; no, it is courage and constancy, and faith alone must be set on work, or you will not be preserved. All your wisdom and contrivances will not preserve you; but it being come to the issue between Christ and antichrist, 'it is the girding up the loins of your mind, and a resisting unto blood against sin,' and abiding in it, that is your duty, and must preserve you. Nothing will save you but faith, courage, and constancy.

(7.) There are, in the Scripture, intimations, that those who, in an especial manner, cleave unto God and his worship, with faith, love, and delight, shall be preserved and saved.' I do not propose this unto you as an object of your faith; all the rest I do; but I say, there are intimations that give me some satisfaction, that they who with quick and lively spirits do act faith, and love, and delight in God and his worship, or that are worshippers in the inner court of the temple, shall be peculiarly secured at such a time.

But I am afraid few of us shall have it, because I see so much coldness and deadness grown generally upon us, and the churches of Christ; it makes me think exercises will come upon us all; for we have need of them.

To conclude,

First, Let not your talk about strange things, keep the thoughts of these things you have been hearing out of your hearts; for you will be tried with antichristianism before you die. We talk of news, and great things we look for in the world, and that antichrist shall be destroyed; and so he will; but I do believe he will try us sorely in the mean time.

Secondly, Take heed of computations. How wofully and wretchedly have we been mistaken by this! We know the time is determined; its beginning and ending is known to God; and we must live by faith till the accomplishment.

Thirdly, So many of us as have afresh engaged ourselves in covenant unto God, let us remember that we have taken the 'mark of God upon our foreheads;' and it will ill become us to set the mark of antichrist by it.

This is all I have to offer unto you as to living by faith, under the apprehensions of those difficulties we have to conflict withal, in reference to the coming in of profaneness and idolatry wherewith we are threatened, by hell and the world, who are at this day combining together to bring them again upon this nation.

SERMON XIII.*

THE USE OF FAITH IN A TIME OF GENERAL DECLENSION IN RELIGION.

The just shall live by his faith.—HAB. ii. 4.

I AM now come to the last thing that was proposed to be spoken to, and with which I shall shut up the subject, viz.

3. How we may live by faith, under an apprehension of great and woful decays in churches, in church members, in professors of all sorts; and in the gradual withdrawing of the glory of God from us all on that account.

I would speak unto three things:

(1.) That this is such a time of decay among us, among churches, among church members, and professors of all sorts and ways throughout this nation; yea, and other nations too, where there are any that fear God.

(2.) That this is, and ought to be, a cause of great trouble and trial unto all that are true believers. And then,

(3.) I shall shew you, how we may live by faith in such a season. What it is faith will do to support the soul at such a time.

(1.) That it is now such a time of decay; there are too many evidences of it. I will name a few things.

[1.] A sense of it is impressed upon the minds of all the most judicious and diligent Christians, that do abound most in self-examination, or do take most notice of the ways of God. Multitudes have I heard testifying of it; complaints are received from many in this nation, and the neighbouring nations, that there is a great decay, as to the power of grace and life of faith, among all sorts of professors. And some of them will go farther in their evidence, and tell us, that they find the effects of it in themselves; that they find it a matter of great difficulty, requiring great watchfulness, and great diligence in any measure to keep up themselves

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unto their former frames; and when they have done all, they do not attain their desire. And to increase this evidence, we are all convinced of it, or else we are notorious hypocrites; for I know not how often I have heard it prayed over in this very place. So that there is sent forth from God a conviction upon the hearts and minds of spiritual, self-examining believers, that churches, church members, professors, and themselves, are under spiritual decays. This is the first evidence: and therefore, in such a season, it was the best part of the church that made that sad complaint; Isa. lxiii. 17. 'O Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our hearts from thy fear?' They were sensible, that there was a judgment of the hand of God upon them.

[2.] The open want of love that is among churches, among church members, among professors, is another evidence of decay. I will not speak of the want of love among churches, one to another. But as to love among church members, we have scarce the shadow of it remaining among us. Where men have relations, where they have acquaintance, where they have been old friends, where they agree in a humour, and converse, there is an appearance of love; and where they agree in a party and faction, there is an appearance of love; but upon the pure spiritual account of Christianity and church membership, we have, I say, scarce the shadow of it left among us. I remember how it was with us, when it was a joy of heart to behold the face of one another, wherein there was love without dissimulation, in sincerity, love attended with pity, compassion, condescension, yea, love attended with delight. But it is dead in churches, dead among professors.

[3.] Another evidence of this decay, is want of delight and diligence in the ordinances of gospel worship. These ordinances were wont to be a joy of heart unto all that feared God; but now there is so much deadness, coldness, and indifferency, so much undervaluing of the word, selffulness, pride, and so much an apprehension that we know every thing, so little endeavour to tremble at every truth, by what means soever it be brought unto us, as gives a manifest evidence of woful decays that are fallen upon us. Dead preachers! dead hearers! all things now go down

among the churches of God, and professors in these nations. And this is attended with two desperate evils; one of which I heard of but lately, but upon inquiry, I find it to be a far greater evil than I took it to be, viz. Men under an apprehension, that as they do not see others enlivened, nor quickened as they were wont to be, by the ordinances of divine worship, and finding no such thing in their own hearts neither, in all probability finding themselves to grow dead and useless, are fallen into an opinion, that there is an end of them, and that they ought to attend unto them no more. And this doth befall some that have long walked soberly, and with great diligence in the use of ordinances: some in this city, and in other places, are led by foolish delusions to it, because they do not find the spirit, and life, and power of the word and ordinances in themselves, and as they think in others. A godly and learned minister, that shewed me a discourse written upon this subject, in defence of ordinances, did acquaint me with so great a number falling into this abomination, that I did not think it had been possible. This is one of the evils.

The other evil that attends it is this, That this deadness and indifferency unto ordinances, and want of bringing our necks to the yoke of Christ therein, against all disputings and arguings of flesh and blood, hath taken such place among us, and proceeded so far, that all ways of reformation are useless. Men may make divisions, and do I know not what, but this I know, there is no way of obtaining any reformation, but for men to engage their hearts to return unto God, in more delight in his service than there hath been. Some utterly forsake the assemblies, some come with great indifferency, using their liberty, off and on, at their pleasure. Are not these things evidences of great decays among us? To me they are. I speak not as to this congregation in particular, but as to the state of all churches that I know or can hear of in these nations.

[4.] The last evidence I shall mention of these decays among us, is our worldly-mindedness, conformity to the world, and security. These things have been so often spoken to you, and no reformation hath ensued, that now they are looked upon as words of course; and I am discouraged from speaking of them any more. But assure yourselves,

this conformity to the world, and this security that is yet found among us, is a great evidence, that the glory of God is departing from us. Ministers preach against worldly-mindedness, security, &c. but it makes no impression upon the minds of men; for we can scarce give an instance of any the least reformation. These things plainly demonstrate, that we are all under great decays.

(2.) A sense of this general decay among churches, church members and professors, ought to be an exercise and concern unto our minds. If we think all is well with us, and are satisfied, while we are free from outward troubles, and not concern ourselves about our decays, I will not say we are hypocrites, but truly we are poor, low, dead, carnal, unspiritual Christians. I thought to have spoken to these three heads; to shew you,

[1.] How God is dishonoured by this general decay.

[2.] How the world is offended and scandalized at it.

[3.] How the ruin of churches is hastened by it, which will befall them assuredly, unless God recover us out of this bad state. But I shall waive these things, and proceed.

(3.) Suppose it be thus, and we do complain of it to one another, not knowing what the issue will be, nor what it may come unto, How shall we live by faith under this consideration? What is the work of faith in this state? If things are so (and I wish any one could evidence they are not; but suppose for once that they are so), and our souls are burdened with an apprehension that they are so; then what will faith do to enable us to pass through this exercise, and to live to God?

I shall tell you something of what I find. And if God help you not to better things, make use of these, and improve them, that you may give glory to God, by believing under this condition also.

[1.] Faith will mind the soul, that notwithstanding this also, yet Christ hath built his church upon that rock, that it shall not be utterly prevailed against. The promise, saith faith, extends itself as well to the inbred adversaries of our own souls, unbelief, deadness, and all these things, as to our outward enemies; Matt. xvi. 18. 'I will build my church upon this rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.' Though we were all dead, helpless, lifeless,

poor creatures; though we had retained almost nothing but outward order, and had lost the very vigour and essence of faith and obedience, yet Christ's church shall abide, and stand, and those that belong to him shall be preserved. Such and such are turned apostates, saith the apostle, 2 Tim. ii. 19. 'Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his.' Here is my ground of hope notwithstanding all this, though one falls after another, though one decays after another, 'nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure,' and it hath a seal upon it, 'God knoweth who are his.' Every one whom he hath effectually called, and built upon the rock Jesus Christ, shall be preserved, whatever befalls the residue of the world. To see such a confluence of all manner of dangerous evils from without, as are coming this day upon the church of God, and to see, in the mean time, so many evidences of a decaying spiritual state in believers themselves, it will put faith to exercise itself upon this promise of Christ, 'I have built my church upon the rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.' If you find your spirits at any time pressed with these things, if nothing better occurs at hand, exercise faith upon this promise of Christ, and upon the firm standing of the foundation of God, that he knoweth who are his, and will carry them through all these difficulties, and land them safe in eternity.

[2.] Faith will also mind the soul, that God hath yet the fulness and residue of the Spirit, and can pour it out when he pleases, to recover us from this woful state and condition, and to renew us to holy obedience unto himself. There are more 'promises of God's giving supplies of his Spirit to deliver us from inward decays, than there are for the putting forth the acts of his power to deliver us from our outward enemies. And God is as able to do the inward work, to revive and renew a spirit of faith, love, and holiness, of meekness, humility, self-denial, and readiness for the cross: he is able, with one word and act of his grace, to renew it, as he is able, by one act of his power, to destroy all his enemies, and make them the footstool of Christ when he pleases. Live in the faith of this.

The psalmist saith, in Psal. cxlvii. 16, 17. 'He sends forth his hoary frost,' and the issue is, the earth is frozen;

he brings a death upon it. But, saith he, in Psal. civ. 30. 'Thou sendest forth thy Spirit, and renewest the face of the earth.' In like manner there is deadness upon all churches and professors in some measure at this time; but God, who hath the fulness of the Spirit, can send him forth, and renew the face of the soul; can give professors and profession another face, not to trim and trick, as now so often is done, not so high and haughty, not so earthly and worldly, as is now so much seen, but humble, meek, holy, broken-hearted, and self-denying. God can send forth his Spirit when he pleases, and give all our churches and professors a new face, in the verdure and flourishing of his grace in them. When God will do this I know not; but I believe God can do this; he is able to do it, able to renew all his churches, by sending out supplies of the Spirit, whose fulness is with him, to recover them in the due and appointed time; and more I believe truly, that when God hath accomplished some ends upon us, and hath stained the glory of all flesh, he will renew the power and glory of religion among us again, even in this nation. I believe it truly, but not as I believe the other things I have mentioned unto you, for those I believe absolutely; namely, that Christ hath built his church upon a rock, and that nothing shall ever finally prevail against it; and that God hath the fulness and the residue of the Spirit to renew us again, to all the glory of profession and holy obedience. These I propose as truths that are infallible, that will not fail you, and upon which you may venture your souls to eternity. And if your faith in these things will not give you support and comfort, I know not what else will.

[3.] When your souls are perplexed within you about these things, your faith will say unto you, 'O my soul, why art thou cast down?' Are not all these things foretold thee? 1 Tim. iv. 1. 'That in the latter times some shall depart from the faith.' 2 Tim. iii. 1—5. 'That perilous days shall come, because men should have a form of godliness, but deny the power.' Hath it not been foretold that churches shall decay, and lose their first faith and love, in examples that have been set before you? Why are you surprised? saith our Saviour, John xvi. 4. 'I have told you these things, that when the time shall come, you may remember that I told you of them.' I was never nearer a surprisal than by this one thing, how it

could possibly be, that after so many instructions, after so many mercies, trials, fears, after so many years carrying our lives in our hands, and so many glorious deliverances, that there should yet be decays found amongst us, and such going backward : it is a great surprisal to one that considers it aright. But seeing it is foretold that so it shall be, let us live by faith ; God hath some great end to accomplish out of it, and then all will be well. ‘ When I have accomplished my whole work upon mount Zion,’ saith God, ‘ then,’ &c. Isa. x. 12.

[4.] And lastly, Faith, if it be in exercise, will put every soul in whom it is upon an especial attendance unto those duties God calls him unto in such a season. This accomplishes and completes our living by faith under such a trial as this is. If faith be in us, and in exercise, it will put us upon all these duties that God requires of us in such a season.

1st. It will put us upon self-examination, how far we ourselves are engaged in these decays, and have contracted the guilt of them.

2dly. It will put us upon great mourning, by reason of God’s withdrawing himself from us.

3dly. It will put us upon watchfulness over ourselves, and over one another, that we be not overtaken by the means and causes of these decays. It will put us,

4thly. Upon zeal for God and the honour of the gospel, that it may not suffer by reason of our miscarriages.

In one word, faith will do something ; but for our parts, we do little or nothing. Faith will do something, I say, wherever it is, when it is stirred up to exercise. But as to these special duties, in reference to these decays that all professors are fallen under ; O how little is it we do in any kind whatever. Would we might advise with one another what to do under these decays, to further one another in recovering ourselves from them. This then is what we are called to, and is required of us, viz. faith in the faithfulness of Christ, who hath built his church upon the rock, that, be things never so bad, it shall not be prevailed against. Faith in the fulness of the Spirit, and his promise to send him to renew the face of the church. Faith in apprehending the truth of God, who hath foretold these things. And faith putting us upon those especial duties, that God requires at our hands in such a season.