

SERMON V.

THE STRENGTH OF FAITH.

He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God.—Rom. iv. 20.

IN this chapter the apostle singleth out a signal example, to make good the conclusion which by sundry convincing demonstrations he had proved in the foregoing chapter; namely, that the justification of a sinner could by no means be brought about, nor accomplished, but by the righteousness of faith in Christ. This, I say, in the example of Abraham, and from the testimonies given concerning him, and the way whereby he was justified before God, the apostle proves from the beginning of the chapter to the end of ver. 17. From thence, to the end of ver. 22. he describes that faith of Abraham, whereby he obtained acceptance with God, that in all things he might propose him as an example, and an encouragement unto us.

Among the many excellencies which are given in, in the description of this faith of his, arising from its cause, object, matter, and manner, not now to be insisted on, this is none of the least which is mentioned in my text: 'He staggered not.'

There is a *μείωσις* in the words, wherein by a negation, the contrary to what is denied, is strongly asserted. 'He staggered not by unbelief,' that is, he was steadfast in believing; or as it is expounded in the close of the verse, 'he was strong in faith.'

The words may yield us these two observations:

Observation 1. All staggering at the promises of God is through unbelief.

Saith the apostle, 'he, staggered not through unbelief.' Men are apt to pretend many other reasons, and do use other pleas; but the truth is, all our staggering is through

unbelief. But this proposition from these words I have long since in another way proved, evinced, and applied.*

There is another proposition lies in the text, and that I shall now apply myself unto, which is this :

Observation 2. Steadfastness in believing the promises is exceeding acceptable unto God.

In treating upon this subject I shall do these two things :

I. Explain the terms of the proposition.

II. Give the proof of it.

I. As to the former of these,

1. There is the object concerning which the affirmation is laid down : ‘ The promises,’ the promises of God. The promises of God are the declaration of the purposes of his grace towards his elect, according to the tenour of the covenant. That pointed unto in my text, was the old great promise of Christ, which contains in it all others ; because ‘ in him all the promises of God are yea and amen ;’ 2 Cor. i. 20. So that although I shall speak nothing but what will be true with reference to every promise of God whatever ; yet I shall bear a chief respect to the promises that exhibit Christ, and the free grace of God in him unto sinners : steadfastness in believing these promises.

2. There is the act that is exercised about this object : and that is, believing. It is steadfastness in believing we speak of.

I shall not make it my design to insist much on the nature of faith, and to debate the differences that are among men about it ; only so much must be spoken concerning it, as may give us an acquaintance with that whereof we are treating.

How many have been the disputes of men about the nature of faith ? The subject, proper object, formal reason of it, all know. And how little the church of God is beholding to men, who have made it their business to involve things of general duty and absolute necessity unto all believers in intricate disputes, men that will duly weigh it may easily know. By some men’s too much understanding others are brought to understand nothing at all. He that would have the things of his own spiritual experience and daily

* See the preceding sermon.

duty made unintelligible to him, let him consider them as stated in men's philosophical disputes about them. Thus some place faith in one distinct faculty of the soul, some in another, and some say there are no such things as distinct faculties in the soul. Some place it in both the chief, the understanding and the will; and some say, it is impossible that one habit should have its residence in two faculties.

For my part, my intention principally is to speak to such as God chooseth, the poor and foolish of the world; and the means whereby he will bring them to himself, are not, I am sure, above that understanding which the Son of God hath given them; 1 John v. 20. And whereas the general way in treating of faith, is, for the most part, to use strictness of expression, that so it may be delivered in a philosophical exactness; the constant way of the Holy Ghost is by metaphorical expressions, accommodations of it to things of sense and daily usage in the meanest, to give a relish and perception of it, to all that are interested in it. And so shall I labour to speak, that every one that doth believe, may know what it is to believe.

Only observe this by the way: that I speak of believing and of faith in respect of that end, and to that purpose only, in reference whereunto Paul here treats of it; that is, in respect of justification, and our acceptation with God. I say then,

(1.) That faith, or believing, in this restrained sense doth not consist solely in the assent of the mind to the truth of the promises, or of any promise. When one affirms any thing to us, and we say we believe him, that is, that the thing he speaks is true, then there is this assent of the mind, without this there is no faith; but this alone is not the faith we speak of. This alone and solitary the devils have, and cannot choose but have it; James ii. 19. They believe that which makes them tremble, on the authority of God who revealeth it.

But you will say, The devil believes only the threats of God; that which makes him tremble; and so his belief is not a general assent, but partial, and is thereby distinguished from our assent, which is to all that God hath revealed, and especially the promises.

I answer, The devil believes the promises no less than he doth the threats of God; that is, that they are true, and shall be accomplished. It is part of his misery, that he cannot but believe them. And the promises of God are as much suited to make him tremble, as his threatenings. The first promise to us was couched in a threatening to him; Gen. iii. 15. And there is no promise wherein a threatening to him is not couched. Every word concerning Christ, or grace by him, speaks his downfall and ruin. Indeed his destruction lies more in promises, than threats. Promises are what weakens him daily, and gives him a continual foretaste of his approaching destruction.

On this consideration it is evident, that believing, or faith, cannot be solely an assent to the truth of these promises, upon the fidelity of the promiser; but this it is also, or originally. Hence it is called, 'the receiving the testimony of God,' and therein 'setting to our seal that God is true;' John iii. 33. But yet I think there is somewhat more in receiving of the testimony of God, and setting our seal to it (agreeing as in contracts, that so it is, and so it shall be), than the bare assent of the mind to the truth of the promises. Although in ordinary speech, to receive a man's testimony, is no more, than to believe what he saith of that concerning which he speaks is true. But there seems moreover in the annexed expression of 'setting to our seal,' that that is included, which he speaks of to Job, chap. v. 27. 'Hear it, and know it for thyself.' There is a receiving of it for ourselves, in those expressions, which add much to a bare assent. I say then, this assent is of faith, though it be not faith. And in saying it is not justifying faith, we do not deny it, but affirm it to be faith in general. The addition of a peculiar assent destroys not the nature of a thing. Now faith in general is such an assent as hath been described.

(2.) It is not in the sole consent of the will to close with the promise, as containing that which is good and suitable. There is the matter of the promise to be considered in believing, as well as the promise itself. Christ with his righteousness and benefits is, as it were, tendered unto us therein. Whence by believing we are said to accept of, to 'receive the atonement;' Rom. v. 11. Now to consent that

the matter of the promise, that which is exhibited in the word of it, is good and desirable, and so to us, and to choose it on that account, is required to believing also; and it is properly the 'receiving of Christ;' John i. 12. but yet it is not only, precisely, and exclusively this. Sarah's faith, Heb. xi. 11. is described by this, that she 'judged him faithful,' who had promised. And this is of the nature of faith, as was said before, the 'judging him faithful that promiseth,' and assenting to the truth of his promises on that account. Now the first of these may be without the second: our assent may be without the consent of the will; but the latter cannot be without the former. But yet there is such an assent, as will certainly produce this choice also.

(3.) I suppose I need not say, it doth not entirely consist in the good liking of the affections, and embracing the things promised. 'The stony ground received the word presently, and with joy;' Matt. xiii. 20. It is said, ver. 5. that 'the seed sprung up immediately because it had not depth of earth.' Where men have warm affections, but not thoroughly prepared minds and hearts, they presently run away with the word, and profess great matters from it; but where it is laid in deep, it is longer commonly before it appears. When a man receives the word only in the affections, the first touch of them cannot be hid; instantly he will be speaking of it, melt under it, and declare how he is affected with it: oh, this sermon hath done me good indeed. But yet this is not faith, when it is alone. They 'receive the word with joy, but have not root in themselves;' ver. 21. When Christ promised 'the bread of life,' that is, himself, John vi. how many were instantly affected with it, and carried out to strong desires of it? 'Lord,' say they, 'evermore give us this bread;' ver. 34. They like it, they desire it at that season, their affections are taken with it; but yet they were but *πρόσκαιροι*, 'temporary,' not true believers; for after a season 'they went back, and walked no more with Christ;' ver. 66. Those 'who have a taste of the heavenly gift;' Heb. vi. 6. do you not think they like the taste, and are affected with it? There are indeed innumerable deceits in this business. I might shew on how many false and corrupt accounts, on what sandy foundations many

men's affections may be exceedingly taken with the word of promise, preached, or considered; so that there is no concluding of believing to lie in any such thing. When affections go before believing, they are little worth; but when they follow it, they are exceeding acceptable and precious in the sight of God.

(4.) It is not solely 'fiducia,' a trust, affianced, or confidence. There is a twofold fiducial trust: one whereby we trust in Christ for the forgiveness of sin, which you may call adherence. It is such a cleaving to Christ, as that we trust in him for the forgiveness of sins, and acceptation with God. And so much as we trust, so much we adhere, and no more. There is also a trust, that our sins are forgiven us, we trust, or rest upon it. Now it cannot be, that either of these should be faith entirely, and that the whole of it should be included in them. There is something more in believing, than in trusting; and something more in trusting, than is absolutely necessary to preserve the entire notion of believing. For we may believe that, wherein we do not trust. But yet this I grant, that where there is believing in Christ, there will be trusting in him more or less. And when faith is increased to some good height, strength, and steadfastness, it is mainly taken up in trust and confidence; John xiv. 1. So to believe, as to free our hearts from trouble and disquietment upon any account whatever, is to trust properly. And that doubting, and staggering, and fear, which in Scripture we find condemned as opposite to faith, are indeed directly opposite to this fiducial reposing our souls on Christ. So the apostle describes his faith, or believing, 2 Tim. i. 12. So to believe, as to be 'persuaded that God is able to keep what we commit to him,' is to put our trust in him.

(5.) Having spoken thus much of these particulars, waving all the arbitrary determinations of the schools, and exactness of words as to philosophical rules and terms; I shall give you such a general description of faith, or believing, as may answer in some measure the proper and metaphorical expressions of it in the Scriptures; where it is termed, looking or seeing, hearing, tasting, resting, rolling ourselves, flying for refuge, trusting, and the like.

[1.] There must be what I spake of in the first place, an

assent to the whole truth of the promises of God, upon this ground and bottom, that he is able and faithful to accomplish them. This certainly is in, if it be not all, our 'receiving the testimony, or witness of God;' John iii. 33. Sarah, of whom we spake before, received 'the testimony of God.' How did she do it? She 'judged him faithful who had promised;' Heb. xi. 11. This God proposes to us in the first place. 'Eternal life is promised by God who cannot lie;' Tit. i. 2. that is, who is so faithful, as that it is utterly impossible he should deceive any. So Heb. vi. 17, 18. 'Wherein God willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.' The design of God is, that we may receive encouragement in our 'flying for refuge to the hope set before us;' that is, in believing. What doth he propose to this end? Why his own faithfulness and immutability, on the account of the engagement of his word and oath. Abraham's faith spoken of, Rom. iv. compriseth this; yea is commended from it, ver. 21.

The Scripture indeed mentions sundry properties of God, on the credit whereof, if I may so speak, our souls are to assent to the truth of his promises, and to acquiesce therein. Two especially are usually named.

1st. His power: 'he is able.' So Rom. iv. 21. chap. xi. 23.

2dly. His faithfulness: as in the places before mentioned, and sundry others.

The sum is, that on the account of God's faithfulness and power, this we are to do, if we will believe, we are to assent to the truth of his promises, and the certainty of their accomplishment. If this be not done, it is in vain to go forward. Let then those, who intend any advantage by what shall afterward be spoken, stay here a little and consider, how they have laid this foundation. Many there are, who never come to any stability all their days, and yet are never able to fix on any certain cause of their shaking and staggering: the foundation was laid disorderly. This first closing with the faithfulness and power of God in the pro-

mises, was never distinctly acted over in and by their souls. And if the foundation be weak, let the building be never so glorious, it will totter, if not fall. Look then to this beginning of your confidence, that this fail you not. And when all other holds fail this will support you from utter sinking, if at any time you are reduced to that condition that you have nothing else.

[2.] Over and above this, faith in the Scripture is expressed, and we find it by experience to be, the will's consent unto, and acceptance of, the Lord Jesus Christ as mediator, he that accomplished his work, as the only way of going to the Father, as the sole and sufficient cause of our acceptance with him, as our only righteousness before him.

It hath been said, that faith is the receiving of Christ as a priest, and a lord, to be saved by him, and ruled by him. This sounds excellent well. Who is so vile, that endeavouring to believe, is not willing to be ruled by Christ, as well as saved by him? A faith that would not have Christ to be lord to rule us, is that faith alone which James rejects. He that would be saved by Christ, and not ruled by him, shall not be saved by him at all. We are to receive a whole Christ, not by halves; in regard of all his offices, not one or another.

This sounds well, makes a fair shew, and there is in some regard truth in what is spoken; but, 'Latet anguis in herba,' Let men explain themselves, and it is this: The receiving of Christ, as a king, is the yielding obedience to him. But that subjection is not a fruit of the faith whereby we are justified, but an essential part of it; so that there is no difference between faith and works or obedience in the business of justification, both being alike a condition of it.

When I lately read one saying, 'That this was one principle that the church of England went on in the reformation, that faith and works have the same consideration in the business of justification;' I could not but stand amazed, and conclude, that either he or I had been asleep ever since we were born; or that there were two churches of England, one that I never knew, and another that he never knew; or else that prejudice is powerful, and makes men confident. Is that the doctrine of the church of England, as they call it? When, where, by whom was it taught, but by Papists and Socinians,

until within a very few years in England? What place hath it in confessions, homilies, liturgies, controversy writers, or any else of repute for learning and religion in England? But this is no place for contest.

Others at length mince the matter, and say, That faith and works have the same respects to our justification that shall be public and solemn at the last day, at the day of judgment. And is this all that they have intended? How they will justify themselves at the day of judgment, for troubling the peace of the saints of God, and shaking the great fundamental articles of the reformation, I know not; but it is no news for men loving novelties to dispute themselves they know not whither, and to recoil or retire unhand somely.

It is true then, we acknowledge that faith receives Christ as a lord, as a king; and it is no true faith that will not, doth not do so, and puts the soul upon all that obedience which he, as the captain of our salvation, requires at our hands. But faith, as it justifies (in its concurrence, whatever it be, thereunto) closeth with Christ for righteousness and acceptation with God only. And give me leave to say, it is in that act no less exclusive of good works, than of sin. It closeth with Christ in and for that, on the account whereof he is our righteousness, and for and by which we are justified.

But you will say, This makes you solifidians, and are you not justly so accounted?

I say, So was Paul a solifidian, whose epistles will confute all the formalists and self-justitiaries in the world. We are solifidians as to justification: Christ, grace, and faith are all. We are not solifidians as to salvation, nor gospel conversation, nor the declaration of the efficacy of our believing. Such solifidians, as exclude every thing from an influence in our justification, but our acceptation by the grace of God, on faith's receiving of Christ for righteousness and salvation, were all the apostles of Jesus Christ. Such solifidians, as exclude, or deny, the necessity of works, and gospel obedience to him that is justified; or that say, a true and justifying faith may consist without holiness, works, and obedience, are condemned by all the apostles, and James in particular.

This then, I say, is required to faith, or believing that we thus receive Christ. John i. 11. 'His own received him not.' The not receiving of Christ for such purposes as he is sent unto us by the Father, is properly unbelief. And therefore, as it follows, the so receiving him is properly faith, or believing; ver. 12. Thus in preaching the gospel we are said to make a tender, or proffer of Christ, as the Scripture doth, Rev. xxii. 17. Now that which answers a tender, or proffer, is the acceptance of it. So that the soul's willing acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ for our righteousness before God, being tendered to us in the promises of the gospel for that end and purpose, from the love of the Father, is the main of that believing which is so acceptable unto God.

[3.] Add hereunto, that which I cannot say is absolutely of the nature of faith, but in some degree or other, secret or more known to the soul, a necessary concomitant of it; and that is, the soul's resting and quieting itself, and satisfying its affections in its interest in, and enjoyment of, a sweet, desirable Saviour. This is called 'cleaving unto the Lord;' Josh. xxiii. 8. the fixing and fastening our affections on God, as ours in covenant. This is the soul's resting in God, its affiance, and trusting in him.

And in these three things, which are intelligible to the meanest soul, and written evidently in the words of the Scripture, and in the experience of those who have to do with God in Christ, do I place the believing, which is so acceptable to God.

3. There is next the qualification of this believing, as laid down in the proposition, and that is, steadfastness, steadfastness in believing. This is included in the negative. It is said of Abraham, that 'he staggered not;' that is, he was steadfast. To clear this up a little, take these few observations.

(1.) Faith, or believing, consists in such an habitual frame of heart, and such actings of the soul, as are capable of degrees, of straitening or enlargement, of strength and weakness. Hence there is mention in the Scripture of great faith, 'O woman great is thy faith:' and of little faith, 'O ye of little faith:' of strong faith, Abraham 'was strong in faith:' and of weak faith, or being weak in faith, 'Him that is weak in the faith receive:' of faith with doubting, 'O ye of little

faith, why did ye doubt?' and of faith excluding doubting, 'being strong in faith he staggered,' or 'doubted not.'

(2.) That faith in every respect is equal as unto sincerity, and differs only in degrees; yea, it is equal in respect of the main effects and advance of it, in justification, perseverance, and salvation. A little faith is no less faith than a great faith; yea, a little faith will carry a man as safely to heaven, though not so comfortably nor so fruitfully, as a great faith. Now

(3.) Steadfastness respects those different degrees of faith. It is not of the nature of faith, but bespeaks such a degree of it, as is acceptable to God that we should have, and every way advantageous to ourselves. It is mentioned by Peter, 2 Epist. iii. 17. 'Take heed lest you fall from your own steadfastness,' or decline from that stability in believing, which you have attained: and by Paul, Col. ii. 5. So that,

(4.) There may be a true faith, that yet may have many troublesome, perplexing doubtings accompanying it; many sinful staggerings and waverings attending it; and yet not be overthrown, but continue true faith still. Men may be true believers, and yet not strong believers. A child that eats milk hath as truly the nature of a man, as he that being grown up lives on strong meat. Now steadfastness denotes stability in believing, in respect of the three things before mentioned, and by it faith is denominated strong, and effectual. And it argues,

[1.] A well grounded, firm, unshaken assent to the truth of the promises; and so it is opposed to wavering; James i. 5, 6.

[2.] A resolved, clear consent to receive and close with Christ, as tendered in the promise for life; and so it is opposed to doubting, that is, troublesome, disquieting, perplexing doubts.

[3.] The settled acquiescence of the soul in the choice made, and the close consented unto; and so it is opposed to abiding trouble; John xiv. 1.

This steadfastness in believing doth not exclude all temptations from without. When we say a tree is firmly rooted, we do not say that the wind never blows upon it. The house that is built on the rock, is not free from assaults and storms.

The captain of our salvation, the beginner and ender of our faith was tempted; and we shall be so, if we follow him. Nor doth it exclude all doubting from within. So long as we have flesh, though faith be steadfast, we shall have unbelief; and that bitter root will bring forth some fruit, more or less, according as Satan gets advantage to water it. But it excludes a falling under temptation, and consequently that trouble and disquietness which ensues thereon: as likewise abiding, perplexing doubts, which make us stagger to and fro, between hope and fear, questioning whether we close with Christ or not, have any interest in the promise or not, and is attended with disconsolation and dejectedness of spirit, with real uncertainty of the event.

This then is that which I intend by steadfastness in believing; The establishment of our hearts in the receiving of Christ, as tendered by the love of the Father, to the peace and settlement of our souls and consciences. And that our hearts should be thus fixed, settled, and established, that we should live in the sense and power of it, is, I say, exceeding acceptable unto God.

There is a twofold evil and miscarriage among us in the great foundation business of closing with Christ in the promise. Some spend all their days in much darkness and disconsolateness, disputing it to and fro in their own thoughts, whether their portion and interest lie therein or not. They are off and on, living and dying, hoping and fearing, and commonly fear most when they have best hold, for that is the nature of doubting. When they are quite cast down, then they set themselves a work to get up; and when they are up to any comfortable persuasion, instantly they fear that all is not well and right; it is not so with them as it should be; and thus they stagger to and fro all their lives, to the grief of the Spirit of God, and the discomfort of their own souls.

Others beginning a serious closing with Christ upon abiding grounds, and finding it a work of difficulty and tediousness to flesh and blood, relapse into generals, inquire no more, but take it for granted, that as much is done as they can accomplish, and so grow formal and secure.

To obviate both these evils I shall confirm the proposi-

tion laid down; but before I proceed to that, I shall draw some corollaries that arise from what hath been spoken in the explication of the proposition already insisted on.

Corollary 1. Though a little, weak faith, where steadfastness is wanting, will carry a man to Christ and heaven, yet it will never carry him comfortably, nor pleasantly thither.

He who hath but a weak faith, shall be put to many desperate plunges; every blast of temptation shall cast him down from his consolation, if not turn him aside from his obedience. At best he is like a man bound in a chain on the top of a high tower; though he cannot fall, yet he cannot but fear, however it will have a good issue.

Corollary 2. The least true faith will do its work safely, though not so sweetly.

True faith in the least degree gives the soul a share in the first resurrection. It is of the vital principle which we receive, when we are quickened. Now be it never so weak a life we have, yet it is a life that shall never fail. It is of the seed of God which abideth, incorruptible seed, that dieth not. A believer is spirit, is quickened from the dead, be he never so young, never so sick, never so weak, he is still alive, and the second death shall have no power over him. A little faith gives a whole Christ. He that hath the least faith, hath as true an interest, though not so clear an interest, in the righteousness of Christ, as the most steadfast believer. Others may be more holy than he, but not one in the world is more righteous than he; for he is righteous with the righteousness of Christ. He cannot but be low in sanctification, for a little faith will bring forth but little or low obedience; if the root be weak, the fruit will not be great. But he is beneath none in justification. The most imperfect faith will give present justification, because it interests the soul in a present Christ. The lowest degree of true faith gives the highest completeness of righteousness, Col. ii. 10. You who have but a weak faith, have yet a strong Christ. So that though all the world should set itself against your little faith, it should not prevail. Sin cannot do it, Satan cannot do it, hell cannot do it. Though you take but weak and faint hold on Christ, he takes sure, strong, and unconquerable hold on you. Have you not often wondered, that this spark of heavenly fire should be kept alive in the midst of the sea? It is

everlasting, a spark that cannot be quenched, a drop of that fountain that can never be wholly dried up. Jesus Christ takes special care of them that are weak in faith, Isa. xl. 11. On what account soever they are sick, and weak, and unable, this good shepherd takes care of them; 'he shall rule, and they shall abide;' Micah v. 4.

Corollary 3. There may be faith, a little faith, where there wants steadfastness, and is much doubting.

Steadfastness is an eminent qualification that all attain not to; so that there may be faith where there is doubting, though I do not say there must be. Doubtings in themselves are opposite to believing. They are, if I may so say, unbelieving. A man can hardly believe all his days and never doubt; but a man may doubt all his days, and never believe. If I see a field overgrown with thistles and weeds, I can say, there may be corn there; but yet the thistles and weeds are not corn. I speak this, because some have no better bottom for their quiet, than that they have been disquieted, that they have doubted. Doubting may be where faith is; but we cannot conclude, that where there is doubting, there is faith; for they may rise against presumption and security, as well as against believing. Yet observe there is a twofold doubting;

(1.) Of the end. Men question what will become of them in the close; they fluctuate about what will be their latter end. Did not Balaam do so, when he cried, 'Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my latter end be like his?' That wretched man was tossed up and down between hopes and fears. This is common to the vilest person in the world. It is but the shaking of their security, if they be alone.

(2.) About the means. The soul doubts whether it loves Christ, and whether Christ loves it, or not. This is far more genuine than the former. It discovers at least, that such a soul is convinced of the excellency and usefulness of Christ, and that it hath a valuation for him. Yea, perhaps this may be jealousy from fervency of love sometimes, and not always from weakness of faith. But however with these doubtings, faith, at least a little faith, may consist. So was it with the poor man who cried out, 'Lord, I believe, Lord, help my unbelief.' There is believing and unbelieving,

faith and doubting, both at work at the same time, in the same person; Jacob and Esau struggling in the same womb.

Use. Let not men from their doubting conclude to their believing. He that satisfies himself that his field hath corn because it hath thistles, may come short of a harvest. If thy fears be more about the end than the means, more about future happiness than present communion with God, thou canst scarce have a clearer argument of a false, corrupt frame of heart. Some flatter themselves with this, that they have doubted and trembled, but now they thank God they are quiet and at rest. How they came to be so, they cannot tell; only whereas they were disquieted and troubled, now all is well with them. How many of this sort have I known, who whilst convictions have been warm upon them, have had many perplexing thoughts about their state and condition; after a while their convictions have worn off, and their doubtings thence arising departed, and they have sunk down into a cold, lifeless frame? This is a miserable bottom of quiet. If there were no way of casting out doubts and fears but by believing, this were somewhat. But presumption and security will do it also, at least for a season.

But these things fall in only by the way, in reference to what was spoken before.

II. I proceed now to confirm the proposition laid down, according to the explanation given of it before.

1. And this I shall do first from Scripture testimonies.

(1.) Take the text itself; ‘he was strong in faith, giving glory to God.’ All that God requires of any of the sons of men is his glory, that he will not give unto another; Isa. xlii. 8. Let God have his glory, and we may take freely whatever we will. Take Christ, take grace, take heaven, take all. The great glory which he will give to us, consists in giving him his glory, and beholding of it. Now if this be the great thing, the only thing that God requires at our hands, if this be the all which he hath reserved to himself, that he be glorified as God, as our God, he that gives him that, gives him what is acceptable to him. Thus Abraham pleased God, by being strong or steadfast in believing; ‘he was strong in faith, and gave glory to God.’

The glory of God is spoken of in various senses in the Scripture.

[1.] The Hebrew word כבוד signifies 'pondus,' or 'weight,' whereunto the apostle alludes when he speaks of 'an eternal weight of glory;' 2 Cor. iv. 17. This is the glory of the thing itself. It likewise signifies splendour, or brightness, where the apostle in like manner speaks of 'the brightness of glory,' Heb. i. 2. which is the greatness and excellency of beauty in all perfections. In this sense the infinite excellency of God, in his inconceivable perfections, raised up in such brightness as utterly exceeds all our apprehensions, is called his glory. And so he is 'the God of glory,' Acts vii. 2. or the most glorious God; and our Saviour is called, 'the Lord of glory,' 1 Cor. ii. 8. in the same sense. In this respect we can give no glory to God; we can add nothing to his excellencies, nor the infinite inconceivable brightness of them, by any thing we do.

[2.] Glory relates not only to the thing itself that is glorious, but to the estimation and opinion we have of it, that is, δόξα; when that which is in itself glorious is esteemed so. The philosopher saith, 'Gloria est frequens de aliquo fama cum laude;' or, 'Consentiens laus bonorum, incorrupta vox bene judicantium de excellenti virtute.' And in this respect, that which is infinitely glorious in itself, may be more or less glorious in its manifestation, and the estimation of it; so glory is not any of God's excellencies or perfections, but it is the esteem and manifestation of them amongst and unto others.

This God declares to be his glory, Exod. xxxiii. 19. Moses desires to see the glory of God; this God calls his face, that is, the glory of God in itself. This, saith God, thou canst not see: 'Thou canst not see my face,' or the brightness of my essential glory, the splendour of my excellencies and perfections. Well, what then; shall he have no acquaintance with it? After this God places him in a rock, and tells him, there he will shew him his glory; and this he doth under the name of his back parts; that is, he will declare to him wherein, and how, his glory is manifested. 'Now this rock that followed them was Christ;' 1 Cor. x. 4. The Lord places Moses in that rock to shew him his glory, intimating that there is no glimpse of it to be obtained, but only by them who are placed in Christ Jesus. Now what is this glory of God, which he thus shewed to Moses? That

he declares, chap. xxxiv. 6. causing his majesty, or some visible signs of his presence, 'to pass before him,' he proclaims the name of God with many gracious properties of his nature and blessedness. As if he should say, Moses, wouldst thou see my glory? This is it, that I may be known to be 'the Lord, the Lord gracious and merciful;' let me be known to be this, and thus, and this is the glory I aim at from the sons of men.

See now how steadfastness in believing gives glory to God. It advanceth and magnifieth all these properties of God, and gives all his attributes their due exaltation. An excellent estimation of them is included in it. Might I here descend to particulars, I could manifest, that there is not any property of God, whereby he hath made himself known to us, but steadfastness in believing gives it the glory which in some measure is due unto it; and that all doubting arises from our calling some divine attribute into question. It were easy to shew how this gives God the glory of his faithfulness, truth, power, righteousness, grace, mercy, goodness, love, patience, and whatever else God hath revealed himself to be.

This then is the force of this first testimony. If the glory of God be all that he requires at our hands, and this steadfastness in believing gives him this glory, and this alone doth so, it must needs be acceptable unto him.

(2.) A testimony of the same importance is Heb. vi. 17, 18. 'The heirs of the promise,' those to whom it is made, the great promise of Christ, are believers; these are said here, 'to fly for refuge,' *καταφυγόντες*, 'the fliers with speed;' the expression is evidently metaphorical. The allusion, say some, is taken from those who ran in a race for a prize. This, they say, the word *κρατῆσαι*, that follows, which signifies 'to take fast hold on,' doth import. Men that run in a race, when they attain the end, seize on, and lay fast hold of, the prize.

Our translators, by rendering the word 'flying for refuge,' manifest that they had respect to the manslayers flying to the city of refuge under the Old Testament: and this way go sundry interpreters. And I am inclined to this acceptance of the metaphor upon a double account.

[1.] Because I think the apostle would more willingly

allude to a Hebrew custom, writing to the Hebrews touching an institution of God, and that directly typical of the matter he had in hand; than to a custom of the Greeks and Romans in their races, which hath not so much light in it, as to the business in hand, as the other.

[2.] Because the design of the place doth evidently hold out a flying from something, as well as a flying to something; in which regard it is said, that there is consolation provided for them, namely, in their deliverance from the evil which they feared and fled from. Now in a race there is indeed a prize proposed, but there is no evil avoided. It was otherwise with him that fled for refuge; for as he had a city of safety before him, so he had the avenger of blood behind him; and he fled with speed and diligence to the one, that he might avoid the other. Now these cities of refuge were provided for the manslayer, who having slain a man at unawares, and being thereby surprised with an apprehension of danger, it being lawful for the avenger of blood to slay him, fled with all his strength to one of those cities, where he was to enjoy immunity and safety.

Thus a poor sinner finding himself in a condition of guilt, surprised with a sense of it, seeing death and destruction ready to seize upon him, flies with all his strength to the bosom of the Lord Jesus, the only city of refuge, from the avenging justice of God, and curse of the law. Now this flying to the bosom of Christ, the hope set before us for relief and safety, is believing. It is here called flying by the Holy Ghost, to express the nature of it to the spiritual sense of believers. What now doth he declare himself to be affected with their 'flying for refuge,' that is, their believing? Why he hath taken all means possible to shew himself abundantly willing to receive them. He hath engaged his word and promise, that they may not in the least doubt or stagger, but know that he is ready to receive them, and give them 'strong consolation.' And what is this consolation? Whence may it appear to arise? Whence did consolation arise to him, who having slain a man at unawares should fly to a city of refuge? Must it not be from hence, the gates of the city would certainly be open to him, that he should find protection there, and be safe guarded from the revenger? Whence then must be our strong con-

solution, if we thus fly for refuge by believing? Must it not be from hence, that God is freely ready to receive us, that he will in no wise shut us out, but that we shall be welcome to him; and with the more speed we come, the more welcome we shall be? This he convinces us of, by the engagement of his word and oath to that purpose. And what farther testimony would we have, that our believing is acceptable to him?

It is said, Heb. x. 38. 'If any man draw back, the Lord's soul hath no pleasure in him.' What is it to draw back? It is to decline from his steadfastness of believing. So the apostle interprets it, ver. 39. 'We are not of them that draw back to perdition, but of them that believe.' Drawing back is opposed to believing. In these drawers back, that come not up to steadfastness in believing, or labour so to do, the Lord's 'soul hath no pleasure;' that is, he exceedingly abhors and abominates them, which is the force of that expression. His delight is in those, who are steadfast in adhering to the promises; in them his soul takes pleasure.

When the Jews treated with our Saviour about salvation, they ask him, 'what they shall do that they may work the work of God;' John vi. 28. that work of God by which they might come to be accepted with him, which is the cry of all convinced persons. Our Saviour's answer is, ver. 29. 'This is that work of God, that you believe.' Will ye know 'the great work, wherein God is so delighted? It is this, saith he, 'that you believe,' and be steadfast therein.

Hence also are many exhortations that are given us by the Holy Ghost to come up hereunto, as Heb. xii. 12. Isa. xxxv. But I shall not farther insist on testimonies, which exceedingly abound to this purpose. The farther demonstrations of the point ensue.

2. The next shall consist in the farther improvement of the first testimony concerning the glory of God, arising from our being steadfast in believing.

This is granted by all, that God's ultimate end in all things he doth himself, and in all that he requires us to do, is his own glory. It cannot be otherwise, if he be the first, only, independent being, and prime cause of all things, and their chiefest good. God having then placed his glory in that which cannot be attained and brought about without

believing, in answer to his present constitution of things, it must needs be acceptable to him; as is a suitable means to a designed end, to any one's acting in wisdom and righteousness.

Bear in mind, I pray, what it is that I mean by believing. Though the word be general and large, yet in my intendment it is restrained to the particulars insisted on, namely, the constant establishment of our souls in receiving the Lord Jesus, tendered unto us in the truth and from the love of the Father, for the pardon of sins, and acceptation of our persons before God. This, I say, according to God's constitution of things in the covenant of grace, is necessary to bring about that end of glory to himself which he aims at. Hence he sums up his whole design to be 'the praise of his glorious grace;' Eph. i. 6.

In Prov. xxv. 2. if I mistake not, this is clearly asserted; 'It is the glory of God to conceal a thing,' or 'to cover a matter.' I told you before what is the glory of God. It is not the splendour and majesty of his infinite and excellent perfections which arise not from any thing he doth, but from what he is; but it is the exaltation, manifestation, and essence of those excellencies. When God is received, believed, known to be such, as he declares himself, therein is he glorified; that is his glory. This glory, saith the Holy Ghost, arises from the covering a matter.

What matter is this? It is not the glory of God to cover every matter, all things whatever; yea, it is his glory to 'bring to light the hidden things of darkness.' The manifestation of his own works 'declares his glory;' Psal. xix. 1. So doth the manifestation of the good works of his people; Matt. v. 16. It is then things of some peculiar kind that are here intended. The following opposition discovers this: 'It is the glory of a king to find out a matter.' What matter is it, that it is the glory of the king to find out? Is it not faults and offences against the law? Is it not the glory of magistrates to find out transgressions, that the transgressors may be punished? This is the glory of the magistrate to inquire, find out, and punish offences, transgressions of the law. It is then, in answer hereunto, a sinful thing, sin itself, that is the matter or thing which it is the glory of God to cover. But what is it to cover a sinful

matter? It is that which is opposed to the magistrate's finding it out; what that is, we have a full description in Job xxix. 16, 17. 'The cause I knew not, I searched out, and brake the jaws of the wicked.' It is to make judicial inquisition after, to find out hidden transgressions, that the offenders may be brought to condign punishment. So that God's concealing a matter, is his not searching, with an intention of punishment, into sins and sinners, to make them naked to the stroke of the law. It is his hiding of sin from the condemning power of the law.

The word here used is the same with that of David, Psal. xxxii. 1. 'Blessed is the man whose sin is covered.' And in sundry other places is it used to the same purpose; which is expressed Micah vii. 17. by 'casting all our sins into the bottom of the sea.' That which is so disposed of, is utterly covered from the sight of men. So doth God express the covering of the sins of his people, as to their not appearance to their condemnation, they shall be 'cast into the bottom of the sea.' Hence are our sins in the New Testament said ἀφεῖναι, which we translate 'forgiven' and 'to forgive,' and ἄφεσις, 'forgiveness,' in twenty places. The word signifies properly to 'remove,' or 'dismiss' one: ἀμαρτήματα ἀφεῖναι, is 'Peccata missa facere,' 'to send or remove away our sins out of sight;' the same in substance with that which is here called 'to cover.' And so is the word used in another business, Matt. xxiii. 23. ἀφήκατε τὰ βαρύτερα τοῦ νόμου, 'you have omitted the weightier things of the law;' that is, you have laid them aside as it were out of sight, taking no care of them. Now the bottom of all these expressions of removing, hiding, covering, and concealing sin, which gives life and significancy to them, making them import forgiveness of sin, is the allusion that is in them to the mercy-seat under the law. The making and use of it, we have Exod. xxv. 17, 18. It was a plate of pure gold lying on the ark called כפרת or 'a covering.' In the ark was the law written on tables of stone. Over the mercy-seat, between the cherubims, was the oracle representing the presence of God. By which the Holy Ghost does signify, that the mercy-seat was to cover the law, and the condemning power of it, as it were, from the eye of God's justice, that we be not consumed. Hence is God said to cover sin, because by the

mercy-seat he hides that which is the strength and power of sin, as to its guilt and tendency unto punishment. The apostle calls this 'mercy-seat,' τὸ ἰλαστήριον, Heb. ix. 5. That word is used but once more in the New Testament, and then Christ is called so; Rom. iii. 25. Or "Ὁν προέθετο ὁ θεὸς τὸ ἰλαστήριον, 'whom God hath proposed as a mercy-seat.' Christ alone is that mercy-seat, by whom sin, and the law, from whence sin hath its rigour, is hidden. And from that typical institution is that expression in the Old Testament, 'Hide me under thy wings;' the wings of the cherubims, where the mercy-seat was; that is, in the bosom of Christ.

Now, saith the holy Ghost, thus to hide, to cover, to pardon sin by Christ, is the glory of God, wherein he will be exalted and admired, and for which he will be praised. Give him this, and you give him his great aim and design. Let him be believed in, trusted on, as God in Christ, pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin, so reconciling the world to himself, and manifesting his glorious properties therein, and he hath his end.

Should I now proceed to shew what God hath done, what he doth, and will do, to set up his glory, it would make it evident indeed, that he aimed at it. His eternal, electing love lies at the bottom of this design, this is the tendency of it, that God may be glorified in the forgiveness of sin. The sending of his Son, a mystery of wisdom, goodness, and righteousness past finding out, with all that by his authority and commission he did, suffered, and doth, was that his name might be glorified in this thing. Hath the new covenant of grace any other end? Did not God on purpose propose, make, and establish that covenant in the blood of his Son, that whereas he had by his works of creation and providence, by the old covenant and law, giving glory to himself in other respects, he might by this glorify himself in the hiding of iniquity? The dispensation of the Spirit for the conversion of sinners, with all the mighty works ensuing thereupon, is to the same, and no other purpose. Wherefore doth God exercise patience, forbearance, long-suffering towards us, such as he will be admired for to eternity, such as our souls stand amazed to think of? It is only that he may bring about this glory of his, the covering of iniquity, and pardoning of sin.

Now what is it, that on our part is required, that this great design of God for his glory may be accomplished in and towards us? Is it not our believing, and steadfastness therein? I need not stay to manifest it; nor yet give farther light or strength to our inference from what hath been spoken; namely, that if these things are so, then our believing and steadfastness therein is exceeding acceptable to God.

3. For the last demonstration of the point I shall add the consideration of one particular, that God useth in the pursuit of his glory before mentioned, and that is, his institution and command of preaching the gospel to all nations, and the great care he hath taken to provide instruments for the propagation of it, and promulgation therein of the word of his grace; Matt. xxviii. 19. 'Go preach the gospel to all nations: to every creature;' Mark xvi. 15. What is this gospel, which he will have preached and declared? Is it any thing but a declaration of his mind and will concerning his gracious acceptance of believing, and steadfastness therein? This God declares of his purpose, his eternal, unchangeable will, that there is by his appointment an infallible, an inviolable connexion between believing on Jesus Christ, the receiving of him, and the everlasting fruition of himself; this he declares to all, but his purpose to bestow faith effectually relates only to some: they 'believe who are ordained to eternal life.' But this purpose of his will, that believing in Christ shall have the end mentioned, righteousness and salvation in the enjoyment of himself, concerns all alike. Now to what end hath the Lord taken care, that this gospel shall be so preached and declared, and that to the consummation of the world, but that indeed, our believing is acceptable to him?

But I shall desist from the pursuit of this demonstration, wherein so many things offer themselves to consideration, as that the naming of them must needs detain me longer from my principal aim, than I am willing.