

## SERMON VI.

THE use of the point insisted on is to encourage to the duty so commended and exalted; or it contains motives unto steadfastness in believing the promises. Amongst the many that are usually insisted on to this purpose, I shall choose out some few that seem to be most effectual thereunto.

*Use 1.* We shall begin with the consideration of God himself, even the Father, and that declaration of his love, kindness, tenderness, readiness, and willingness to receive poor believers, which he hath made of himself in Christ Jesus. According as our apprehensions are of him and his heart towards us, so will the settlement of our souls in cleaving to him by believing be. We are amongst men free and easy with them whom we know to be of a kind, loving, compassionate disposition; but full of doubts, fears, and jealousies when we have to deal with those who are morose, peevish and froward. Entertaining hard thoughts of God ends perpetually in contrivances to fly, and keep at a distance from him, and to employ ourselves about any thing in the world, rather than to be treating and conversing with him. What delight can any one take in him, whom he conceives to be always furious, wrathful, ready to destroy? Or what comfortable expectation can any one have from such a one? Consider then in some particulars what God declares of himself, and try in the exercising of your thoughts thereon, whether it be not effectual to engage your hearts to steadfastness in believing the promises, and closing with the Son of his love tendered in them.

(1.) He gives us his name for our support; Isa. l. 10. He speaks to poor, dejected, bewildered, fainting sinners: give not over, let not go your hold, though you be in darkness to all other means of support and consolation, yet 'trust in the name of the Lord.' And, saith he, in case you do so, this 'name shall be a strong tower unto you;' Prov. xviii. 10. And what this name of God, which is such a stay and safe defence is, is declared at large, Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. This name of his, is that glory which he promised to

shew to Moses, chap. xxxiii. to be known by this name is that great glory of God, which he aims to be exalted in; yea, and God is so fully known by his name, and the whole of the obedience he requireth of us is so ordered and disposed in the revelation thereof, that when our Saviour had made him and his whole will known from his bosom, he sums up his whole work in this: 'I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world;' John xvii. 6. The manifestation of the name of God to the elect, was the great work of Christ on the earth, as he was the prophet and teacher of his church. He declared the name of God, his gracious, loving, tender nature, his blessed properties that were fit to encourage poor creatures to come to him, and to trust in him. This then is his name with whom we have to do in this matter. The name he hath given himself for us to know him, and call him by, that we may deal with him as such, as his name bespeaks him to be. He is gracious, loving, ready to pity, help, receive us, delighting in our good, rejoicing in our approach to him. This he hath proclaimed of himself, this his only Son hath revealed him to be. He is not called Apollyon, a destroyer; but the Saviour of men. Who would not venture on him, in and by the way which himself hath appointed and approved?

(2.) As is his name, so is his nature. Saith he of himself, Isa. xxvii. 4. 'Fury is not in me.' He speaks with reference to his church, to believers, of whom we are speaking. There is no such thing as that anger and wrath in God in reference to thee, whereof thou art afraid. Hast thou had hard thoughts of him? Hast thou nothing but entertained affrighting reports concerning him, as though he were a devouring fire, and endless burnings? Be not, saith he, mistaken, 'fury is not in me.' He hath not one wrathful, revengeful thought towards thee. No, 'take hold of his strength, and you shall have peace;' ver. 5. Nay, 'he is love,' 1 John iv. 9. 16. of an infinitely loving and tender nature; all love, there is nothing in him that is inconsistent with love itself. We see how a little love, that is but a weak affection in the nature of a man, will carry a tender father towards a child. How did it melt, soften, reconcile the father of the prodigal in the parable? 'Oh, my

son Absalom, [would to God I had died for thee!] saith David, a poor father in distress for the death of a rebellious child. How will a child bear himself above dread and terror, under many miscarriages, upon the account of the love of a tender father? What then shall we say, or think of him, who is love in the abstract, whose nature is love? May we not conclude, that certainly he 'is merciful, gracious, slow to anger, and great in mercy,' as the psalmist speaks, Psal. ciii. 8. According as we are by degrees led into an acquaintance with God in his properties (for we are led into it by degrees and steps, not being able at once to bear all the glory which he is pleased here to shine upon us with), so are we amazed with his several excellencies. Experiences of any property of God as engaged in Christ, and exercising itself for our good, is greatly conquering to the soul: but none so much as this, his being love, and ready to forgive on that account. Such is the frame of the church, Micah vii. 18. 'Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by transgression?' Can it enter into the heart of man? Oh, who is like to him? Is it possible he should be thus to sinners? This discovery overwhelms the soul, and strengthens it in faith and trust in him.

There is a general compassion in God, by which he proceeds in the dispensation of his providence, that is too hard for the apprehensions of men, when they come to be concerned in it. Poor Jonah was angry that he was so merciful; chap. iv. 2. 'I knew that thou wast not one for me to deal with, thou art so gracious and merciful, slow to anger, of such kindness, and repentest thee of the evil,' that it is not for me with any credit or reputation to be engaged and employed in thy work and service. And if God be thus full of compassion to the world, which to-day is, and to-morrow shall be cast into the fire; is he not much more loving and tender unto you? 'O, ye of little faith!' Suit then the thoughts of your hearts in your dealing with God to this revelation, which he hath made of his own nature. He is good, love and kindness itself, fury is not in him, he is ready to forgive, accept, embrace. And,

(3.) According to his name and nature, so are his dealings with us, and his actings towards us. From him who is so called, so disposed, we may expect that what he doth in

a suitableness thereunto, he will do with great readiness and cheerfulness, that so he may answer his name, and express his nature. How then will he shew and manifest these things? See Isa. lv. 7. 'He will have mercy:' he is love, 'he will have mercy;' yea, 'he will abundantly pardon:' But how will he do it? ver. 8. Alas! you cannot think how: 'His thoughts are not as your thoughts.' You have poor, low, mean thoughts of God's way of pardoning, you can by no means reach to it or comprehend it: raise your apprehensions to the utmost, yet you come not near it; ver. 9. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth; so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.' But doth not God then pardon as we do? come hardly to it, through many persuasions, and at length do it *ἐκὼν ἀέκοντί γε θυμῷ*, 'with an unwilling kind of willingness,' that ingenuous spirits had almost as willingly have our wrath, as our pardon? No such thing. What he doth he doth with his whole heart, and his whole soul, Jer. xxxii. 41. and rejoices in the doing of it; Zeph. iii. 17. 'He will have mercy, he will abundantly pardon;' he will do it with his whole soul; he will rejoice in his so doing, and rest in his love. I know not what we can desire more to assure us of free acceptance with him. You will say perhaps, that this is but sometimes; and it is well if we can come nigh him in that season. Nay, but he is acting herein suitably to his name and nature, his whole soul, and his whole heart is in it; and therefore he will take a course for the accomplishing of it; Isa. xxx. 18. He will 'wait to be gracious;' his heart is set upon it, and he will take advantage to accomplish his desire and design. And if our stubbornness and folly be such as to be ready to wear out his patience, to make him weary, as he complains, Isa. xliii. 24. and to cause him to serve beyond the limits of his patience; he will be exalted, take to himself his great power for the removal of our stubbornness, that he may be merciful unto us: one way or other he will accomplish the desire of his heart, the design of his grace.

For the farther clearing of this truth, take along with you these few considerations of God's dealing with us, and his condescension therein, that he may act suitably to his own nature and name.

[1.] His comparing himself to creatures of the most tender and boundless affection; Isa. xlix. 15, 16. This is as high as we can go. The affection of a mother to a sucking child, the child of her womb, is the utmost instance that we can give of love, tenderness, and affection. This, says God, you cannot think, you ought not to imagine, that a tender, loving mother should not have compassion on 'a sucking child, the son of her womb.' Things will act according to their natures, even tigers love their own offspring. And shall 'a woman forget her sucking child?' But yet, saith God, raise up your apprehensions to this, take it for granted that she may do so, which yet without offering violence to nature cannot be imagined, 'yet I will not forget you.' This will not reach my love, my affection. Were we as secure of the love of God to us, as we are of the love of a good gracious mother to her sucking child, whom we see embracing of it, and rejoicing over it all the day long, we would think our estate very comfortable and secure. But alas! what is this to the love of God to the meanest saint on the earth? What is a drop to the ocean? What is a little dying, decaying affection, to an infiniteness, an eternity of love? See the working of this love in God, Hos. xi. 8, 9. Jer. xxxi. 20.

[2.] His condescension to entreat us that it may be so, that he may exercise pity, pardon, goodness, kindness, mercy towards us. He is so full, that he is, as it were, pained until he can get us to himself, that he may communicate of his love unto us. 'We pray you,' says the apostle, 'in Christ's stead, as if God by us did beseech you.' What to do? What is he so earnest about? What would God have of us? Some great thing, some difficult service assuredly. No, says he, but 'be reconciled to God;' 2 Cor. v. 20. Says God, O, ye sons of men, 'why will you die?' I beseech you, be friends with me, let us agree, accept of the atonement. I have love for you, take mercy, take pardon, do not destroy your own souls. 'This is the rest wherewith you may cause the weary to rest, and this is the refreshing;' Isa. xxviii. 12. Remember how the Scripture abounds with exhortations and entreaties to this purpose.

[3.] In condescension to our weakness, he hath added his oath to this purpose. Will we not yet believe him?

Will we not yet venture upon him? Are we afraid that if we put ourselves upon him, into his hand, he will kill us, we shall die? He gives us this last possible relief against such misgiving thoughts. Swear unto me that I shall not die, is the utmost that any one requires, when with the greatest ground of mistrust he gives up himself to him that is mightier than he. Now, 'as I live, saith the Lord, I would not the death of a sinner;' Ezek. xxxiii. 11. Methinks this should put an end to all strife. We have his promise and oath, Heb. vi. 18. and what would we have more? He is of an infinite, loving, and tender nature, he entreats us to come to him, and swears we shall not suffer by our so doing. Innumerable other instances of the like kind might be given, to evidence the actings of God towards us to be suitable to his name and nature before insisted on.

Now the end aimed at, as you know, in these considerations, is by them to encourage our hearts in the belief of the promises. It is God with whom therein we have to do. The things we receive by our believing are excellent, desirable, what alone we want, and which will do us good to eternity. The difficulties of believing arise from our unworthiness, and the terror of him with whom we have to do. To disentangle our souls from under the power of such fears and considerations, this in the first place is proposed, the tender, gracious, loving nature of him, with whom herein we have to do. Fill your hearts then with such thoughts of God as these, exercise your minds with such apprehensions of him: the psalmist tells you what will be the issue of it, Psal. ix. 10. 'They that know thy name, will put their trust in thee;' establishment in believing will ensue. If we know the name of God, as by himself revealed, know the love and kindness wrapped up therein, we cannot but trust him. Let us be always thinking of God, with a clear persuasion that so it is, that he is gracious, loving, ready to receive us, delighting, rejoicing to embrace us, to do us good, to give us mercy and glory, whatever he hath promised in Christ; and it will exceedingly tend to the establishment of our hearts.

But now concerning the things that have been spoken, great caution is to be used. It is not a general notion of the nature of God that I have been insisting on; but the goodness and love of God to his in Christ Jesus. Wherefore,

farther to clear this whole business, and that a sure foundation may be laid of this great thing, I desire to add the following observations.

1st. I acknowledge that all that can be said, by all or any of the sons of men, concerning the goodness, loveliness, kindness of God in his own blessed nature, is inconceivably, infinitely below what it is in itself. What a little portion is it that we all know of his goodness? Though we have all his works and his whole word to teach us; yet as we have no affections large enough to entertain it, so no faculty to receive or apprehend it. Admiration, which is the soul's 'nonplus,' its doing it knows not what, the winding of it up until it stands still, ready to break, is all that we can arrive unto in the consideration hereof. His excellencies and perfections in this kind are sufficient, superabundant for the engagement of the love and obedience of all rational creatures; and when they can go no farther, they may with the psalmist call in all their fellow-creatures to the work. Nor can any man exercise himself in a more noble contemplation, than that of the beauty and loveliness of God. 'How great is his goodness! How great is his beauty!' They who have nothing but horrid, harsh apprehensions of the nature of God, that he is insupportably severe and wrathful, know him not. To have thoughts of him as cruel and sanguinary, to make use of his greatness and infinite excellencies only to frighten, terrify, and destroy the work of his hands, who is good, and doth good, who made all things good, in beauty and order, and who loves all the things he hath made, who hath filled all that we see, or can think on, with the fruits of his goodness, is unreasonable, unjust, and wicked. Consider God and his works together as he made them, and in the order by him assigned to them; there is nothing in his nature towards you but kindness, benignity, goodness, power exerted to continue to you the goodness first imparted, grace and bounty in daily, continual additions of more.

But alas! they are sinners of whom we speak. It is true, in God, as he is by nature, there is an abundant excellency and beauty, a ravishing goodness and love for the endearing of his creatures, as he made them, they could desire no more; the not loving him above all for his loveliness, for the suitableness of his excellencies to bind their hearts to

him as their chiefest and only good, was the sin of some of them: but now the whole state of things is changed, upon a supposition of the entrance of sin. God indeed is not changed, his excellencies and perfections are the same from eternity to eternity; but the creature is changed; and what was desirable and amiable before to him, ceases to be so to him, though it continue to be so in itself. He who whilst he stood in the law of his creation had boldness with God, was neither afraid nor ashamed, after he had sinned trembled at the hearing of his voice, yea, endeavoured to part with him for ever, and to hide himself from him. What property of God was more endearing to his creatures than his holiness? How is he glorious, lovely, desirable above all to them who abide in his image and likeness? But as for sinners, they cannot serve him, because of his holiness; Josh. xxiv. 19. In the revelation of God to sinners, together with the discovery of the excellencies before mentioned, of his goodness, kindness, graciousness; there is also a vision given of his justice, wrath, anger, severity, and indignation against sin. These unconquerably interpose between the sinner and all emanations and fruits of goodness and love. Whence, instead of being endeared to God, their contrivance is that of Micah vi. 7, 8. and upon a conviction of the successlessness of any such attempts, they cry out, 'Who amongst us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?' Isa. xxxiii. 14. A desire to avoid him to all eternity is all that a sinner's most choice consideration of God, in his own essential excellencies, can lead him to. For who will set the thorns in battle against him? Who will bring the stubble that is fully dry to a consuming fire? And therefore it is, that those who propose general grace from a natural goodness in God, as a ground of consolation to sinners, when they come to answer that objection, Yea, but God is just, as well as merciful; do, with many good words, take away with one hand just as much as they give with the other. Apprehend, say they, God's gracious nature, he is good to all, trust upon it, believe not them that say otherwise. But he is just also, and will not let any sin go unpunished, and therefore cannot but punish sin according to its demerit. Where is now the consolation spoken of? Wherefore observe,



2dly. That since the entrance of sin, there is no apprehension, I mean for sinners, of a goodness, love, and kindness in God, as flowing from his natural properties, but upon an account of the interposition of his sovereign will and pleasure. It is most false, which by some is said, that special grace flows from that which they call general grace, and special mercy from general mercy. There is a whole nest of mistakes in that conception. God's sovereign, distinguishing will is the fountain of all special grace and mercy. 'I will,' saith he, 'cause all my glory to pass before thee;' and 'I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy;' Exod. xxxiii. 19. Rom. ix. 15. Here is the fountain of mercy, even the will of God. He is of a merciful and gracious nature, but dispenses mercy and grace by his sovereign will. It is electing love that is at the bottom of all special grace, all special kindness; whence 'the election obtains, when the rest are hardened;' Rom. xi. 7. He 'blesseth us with spiritual blessings, according as he hath chosen us;' Eph. i. 3, 4. God having made all things good, and imparted of the fruits of his goodness to them, might without the least injury to, or restraint of, his own goodness, have given over all them who sinned, and came short of his glory, to an everlasting separation from him. That he deals otherwise with any of them, is not from any propensity in his nature and goodness towards their relief, but from his sovereign, wise, gracious will, wherein he most freely purposed in himself to do them good by Christ; Eph. i. 9.

This I say then, all considerations of the goodness and mercifulness of the nature of God, and of general grace on that account, are so balanced in the soul of a sinner by those of his justice and severity, so weakened by the experience all men have of the not exerting those properties effectually for the good of all that are pretended to have a right thereunto, that they are no ground, as so considered, of consolation to sinners. And if any one should venture to draw nigh unto God, on the account of such general grace, he would meet the sword of justice before he would lay hold upon him. So that,

3dly. Where there is mention in the Scripture made of the goodness of God, by which he reveals himself to be love, to be gracious, and tender, it is not upon the general ac-

count of his perfections considered in himself, but on the new and special account of the free engagement of his attributes in Christ, with regard to his elect. Such expressions as far as they have a spiritual tendency, and are not restrained to the law of providence, belong to the covenant of grace, and God manifested in Christ. And this is that which is intended by our divines, who say, that it is not naturally from the goodness of God, that he doth good to sinners, but from his gracious will. For were it not for that, all communications of the other unto sinners would be everlastingly shut up.

This then is that which we are to close withal; the gracious nature of God, even the Father, as manifested in Christ, on the ground of the atonement made for sin. This is he whom the poor weak believer hath to do withal. This is he who invites us to the acceptance of Christ in the promises: he with whom we have principally to do in all this affair. He is love, ready, willing to receive and embrace those who come to him by Christ. Be convinced of his good will and kindness, his patience to us-ward, and we cannot but be established in closing with his faithfulness in his promises.

4thly. Observe who it is of whom I am speaking. It is believers, those who are interested in God by Christ. Let others then, such as are not so, take heed lest they abuse and wrest the doctrine of the grace of God to their own destruction. I know nothing is more common with men of vain and light spirits, formalists, yea, and open presumptuous sinners, than to say and think God is merciful; there is yet good hopes on that account, he made not men to damn them, and whatever preachers say, it will, at least it may, be well with us at last. But, poor creatures! even this God, of whom we have been speaking, 'is a consuming fire: a God of purer eyes than to behold iniquity:' a God that will not let the least sin go unpunished. And the greater is his love, his goodness, his condescension to those who come in unto him upon his own terms by Christ; the greater will be his wrath and indignation against those who refuse his tender of love in his own way, and yet 'add drunkenness to thirst, and say they shall have peace, though they walk in the imaginations of their own hearts.'

*Use 2.* Let a second motive be taken from the excellencies of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom by believing we do close with and receive. Now the excellencies of his person are such, as not only may engage us to come to him to attain them; but they are all suited to encourage us in our coming, to support us, and make us steadfast in our believing.<sup>a</sup>

*Use 3.* We may likewise to the same purpose consider the promises of God, wherein both his love, and the excellency and suitableness of the Lord Jesus Christ are signally and eminently expressed. Many things to very good purpose are usually spoken of the promises, their nature, stability, preciousness, efficacy, centring all in one covenant; their confirmation in Christ is usually insisted on, being those in particular which the soul in believing closes withal. I shall at present pitch on these two things.

(1.) The infinite condescension the Lord useth in them, for the obviating all the objections and fears of our unbelieving hearts.

(2.) The manifestation of his wisdom and love in suiting them to the most pressing wants, troubles, disquietments, and fears of our souls, that we must needs see his intentment in them to do us good.

(1.) The first of these might be evinced by sundry sorts of instances. I shall insist on one only, and that is the unexpected relief that is laid up in them for us, exhibiting grace and mercy, when any thing in the world might rather be looked for. This, with the use of it, I shall manifest by an induction of some particular promises which are generally known to all.

Isa. xliii. 22—26. Here are persons guilty of sundry sinful follies. The Lord chargeth them home upon their consciences to their trouble and disquietment; he makes them go with wounds and blows upon that account. They had neglected his worship, and not called on his name. And whereas they could not utterly cast off all performance of duties, yet what they did abide in the performance of, was exceeding burdensome to them; they were weary of it, yea, weary of God therein; and of all spiritual communion and converse with him: 'Thou hast been weary of me.' Their

<sup>a</sup> Upon this head, in its several branches, see his book, *Of Communion with God*. Works, vol. x. pp. 72—96.

convictions compelled them to do God some service; but it was, as we say, a death to them; they were weary of it; and most things, either as to the matter or manner that God required, they utterly neglected. What then says God of himself in reference to this state of theirs? Notwithstanding all my patience, 'thou hast made me weary of thee;' like one that hath a hard service, that cannot abide in it; it is a bondage, says God, for me to have any thing to do with thee. Suppose we now a poor soul, fully convinced, that thus is the state and condition with him; so powerful is his unbelief and corruption, that he is weary of God and his ways; it may be he would faintly have it otherwise, and therefore binds himself to the performance of duties, if so be that God thereby may be flattered: but withal because of his innumerable follies, God also is weary of him; that he can bear the bondage of him no longer; he is 'weary of serving.' What can such a one conclude with himself, but that everlasting separation from God, will be the close of this dispensation? He is weary of God, and God is weary of him; surely then they must part, and that for ever. What remedy is there, or can there be? Poor soul lie down in darkness.

But see now what God says in this case, and what an unexpected condescension there is in the word of promise. Is it, Be gone? Take a bill of divorce? Take thine own course, and I will take mine against thee? No, says God, this is an estate and condition whereof 'I am weary,' and 'thou art weary;' I am weary of thy multiplying the guilt of sin; thou art wearied in serving the power of thy sin; I will put an end to this state of things, we will have peace again between us: 'I will blot out thy sins, and remember thine iniquities no more: I, even I, will do it.' He redoubles the word passionately, emphatically to call to mind who he is, with whom in this condition we have to do: 'I, even I,' who am God and not man; I whose thoughts are not as your thoughts; I who am great in mercy, and who will abundantly pardon; I will do it.

Yea, but saith the poor convinced soul, I know no reason why thou shouldst do so, I cannot believe it; for I know not upon what account I should be so dealt withal. Says God, I know full well that there is nothing in thee, upon the

account whereof I should thus deal with thee; there is nothing in thee, but for what thou deservest to be everlastingly cut off; but quiet thy heart, I will do it 'for my own sake.' I have deeper engagements on my own account for this, than thou canst look into.

Doubtless such a word as this coming in, when God and the soul are at the point of giving over and parting fellowship; when the soul is ready to do so indeed, and hath great cause to think that God will be first therein; then, contrary to all expectation, and above all hopes, must needs constrain it to cry out, as Thomas upon sight of the wounds of Christ, 'My Lord and my God.' Let the soul that cannot get itself unto any steadfastness in closing with Christ in the promises; that staggers, and is tossed to and fro, between hopes and fears, being filled with a sense of sin and unworthiness, dwell a while upon the consideration of this unexpected surprisal, and give up itself to the power of it.

Isa. lvii. 17, 18. gives me another instance to the same purpose. This seems to be the description of a man totally rejected of God. The most dejected sinner can hardly make a more deplorable description of his condition, though ready enough to speak all the evil of himself, that he can think of. Let us see how things are disposed. There is an iniquity found in him and upon him, that the soul of God abhors. In this evil there is a continuance, until God manifest himself to take notice of it, and to be provoked with it: 'I was wroth,' saith God, and took a course to let him know so; 'I laid my hand upon him and smote him,' in some outward dispensation, that he could not but take notice that 'I was wroth.' Upon this smiting it may be he begins to seek and pray, but I am not found of him: 'I hid me,' I let him pray, but took no notice of him, but hid myself in wrath. Surely this will do, he will now leave his iniquity and return to me. Nay, saith God, he grows worse than ever, neglecting my smiting, hiding, wrath: 'He goes on frowardly in the ways of his own heart.'

God had appointed in the law, that when a son was rebellious against his parents, and grown incorrigible therein, he should be 'stoned with stones.' What shall be done then with this person, who is thus incorrigible under the

hand of God? Says God, 'I have seen his ways,' it will not be better. Shall I destroy him, consume him, make him as Admah and Zeboim? Ah! 'my bowels are turned in me, my repentings are kindled together: I will heal him.' If he goes on thus, and no outward means will do him good, he must perish; but 'I will heal him.' He wounded his soul, I also wounded him in the blows I gave him, when I was wroth. 'Is he not my dear child? Since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore my bowels are troubled for him, I will surely have mercy on him;' Jer. xxxi. 20. He shall have wine and oil, grace and pardon for all his wounds. But alas! he is not able to go one step in God's ways, he is so wonted to his own. Leave that to me, saith God, 'I will lead him;' I will give him strength, guidance, and direction to go in my way. 'I will lead him, yea and give him comfort' also.

Now if any one cannot in some measure bring his condition within the verge and compass of this promise, it is hard with him indeed. And as I know the necessity of that duty and usefulness of searching our hearts for the fruits of the Spirit in us, whereby we are made meet for communion with God, which are all evidences of our acceptance with God, and pardon of sin thereon; so, I dare say, these are promises that will sufficiently warrant a perplexed soul to close with Christ, as tendered from the love of the Father, even when it can find in itself no other qualifications or conditions, but only such as render it every way unworthy to be accepted. We do not say to a poor, naked, hungry, harbourless man, Go get thee clothes, get thee food, get thee a habitation, and then I will give thee an alms: no, but because thou wantest all these, therefore I will give thee an alms. Because thou art poor, blind, polluted, guilty, sinful, I will give thee mercy, says God.

Yea, but at least a man's sense of his state and condition, with his acknowledgment of it, is needful to precede his closing with the promise. It is so, as to his receiving of it, this oftentimes being the fruit and work of the promise as given itself. But as to the tender of the promise, and Christ in the promise unto us, it is not so. When did God give the great promise of Christ to Adam? was it when he was sorrowing, repenting, qualifying his soul? No, but when he

was flying, hiding, and had no thoughts but of separation from God. God calls him forth; and at once tells him what he had deserved, pronounces the curse, and gives him the blessing. 'I raised thee up,' saith Christ, 'under the apple-tree, there thy mother brought thee forth;' Cant. viii. 5. From the very place of sin, Christ raiseth up the soul. So Isa. xlv. 12. 'Hearken to me ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness.' Here are two notable qualifications, stout-heartedness and remoteness from righteousness. What saith God to them, ver. 13? He discourses to them of mercy and salvation. And, chap. lv. 1. 'Buy,' saith he, 'wine and milk.' Yea, but I have nothing to buy withal, and these things require a price. Indeed so they do, but take them 'without money, and without price.' But he calls on them only, who 'are thirsty.' True, but it is a thirst of indigency and total want, not a thirst of spiritual desires, for in whomsoever that is, they have already tasted of this wine and milk, and are blessed; Matt. v. Nay, we may go one step farther; Prov. ix. 4, 5. Christ invites them to his bread and wine, who have no heart. This commonly is the last objection that an unbelieving heart makes against itself, it hath no mind to Christ. Indeed he hath no heart for Christ, but yet, saith Christ, thou shalt not thus go off, I will not admit of this excuse; you that have no heart, 'turn in hither.'

Now, I say, this obviating of all objections, by unexpected appearances of love, mercy, and compassion in the promises, is a strong inducement unto steadfastness in believing. When a soul shall find, that God takes for granted that all is true, which it can charge itself withal, that its sin, folly, unbelief, heartlessness, is so, as he apprehends it, and unconceivably worse than he can think; that he takes for granted all the aggravations of his sins that lie so dismally in his eye; his backsliding, frowardness, greatness of sin, impotency, coldness at the present, not answering in affection to the convictions that are upon him; and notwithstanding all this, yet come, let us agree, accept of peace; close with Christ, receive him from my love; surely it cannot but in some measure engage it into a rest and acquiescence in the word of promise.

(2.) The second part of this motive, is taken from the suitability of the promises to every real distress and cause

of staggering whatever. My meaning is, that whereas we are exercised with great variety of doubts and fears, of pressures and perplexities, God hath tempered his love and mercy in Christ, as prepared in the promises, unto every one of these wants and straits whatever. Had God only declared himself to us, as God almighty, God all-sufficient, he might justly require and expect that we should act faith on him in every condition. But moreover, he hath as it were drawn out his own all-sufficiency in Christ into numberless streams, flowing in upon all our particular wants, distresses, and temptations whatever. When God gave manna in the wilderness, it was to be gathered and ground in mills, or beat in mortars, and fried in pans, before it could be eaten; Numb. xi. 8. But the bread which came from heaven, the manna in the promises, is already ground, beaten, baked, ready for every one's hunger. It is useful, if you have a well about your house, whither you may repair to draw water; but when you have several pipes from a fountain that convey water to every room, for every particular business, you are greatly to blame, if your occasions are not supplied. We have not only a well of salvation to draw water from, but also innumerable streams flowing from that well into every empty vessel.

I shall give one or two instances of this kind.

Isa. xxxii. 2. Here are four pressures and troubles mentioned, whereunto we may be exposed: [1.] The wind; [2.] A tempest; [3.] Dearth; [4.] Weariness. And unto all these is the man in the promise, the Lord Jesus Christ, the king that 'reigns in righteousness,' ver. 1. suited as a supply in them, or against them.

[1.] The first proposed evil is 'the wind;' and in respect hereof Christ is a 'hiding-place.' He that was ready to be cast from the top of a rock with a strong wind, would desire nothing more than a hiding-place, until the strong blast were over. When fierce winds have driven a vessel at sea from all its anchors, so that it hath nothing to keep it from splitting on the next rock whereunto it is driven; a safe harbour, a hiding-place, is the great desire and expectation of the poor creatures that are in it. Our Saviour tells us what this wind is, Matt. vii. 25. The wind that blows upon and casts down false professors to the ground, is the wind



of strong and urging temptations. Is this the condition of the soul? strong temptations beat upon it, which are ready to hurry it down into sin and folly, that it hath no rest from them, one blast immediately succeeding another, that the soul begins to faint, to be weary, give over, and say, I shall perish, I cannot hold out to the end? Is this thy condition? See the Lord Christ suited unto it, and the relief that is in him, in this promise he is 'a hiding-place.' Saith he, These temptations seek thy life, but with me thou shalt be safe. Fly to his bosom, retreat into his arms; expect relief by faith from him, and thou shalt be safe.

[2.] There is 'a tempest,' in reference whereunto Christ is here said to be 'a covert.' A tempest in the Scripture represents the wrath of God for sin. 'He breaks me,' saith Job, 'with a tempest;' chap. ix. 17. when he lay under a sense of the displeasure and indignation of God. He threatens to 'rain upon the wicked a horrible tempest;' Psal. xi. 6. A tempest is a violent mixture of wind, rain, hail, thunder, darkness, and the like. Those who have been at sea, will tell you what a tempest means. Such was that in Egypt, Exod. ix. 23. There was 'thunder, and hail, and fire running upon the ground: fire or dreadful lightning mingled with hail;' ver. 24. What did men now do upon the apprehension of this tempest? They 'made their servants and cattle flee into the houses;' ver. 20. got them into safe covert, that they might not be destroyed, and they were safe accordingly.

Suppose a poor creature to be under this tempest, full of sad and dreadful thoughts and apprehensions of the wrath of God; behind, before, round about he can see nothing but hailstones and coals of fire, heaven is dark and dismal over him, he hath not seen sun, moon, or stars in many days, not one glimpse of light from above, or hopes of an end. I shall perish, the earth shakes under me, the pit is opening for me. Is there no hope? Why, see how Christ is suited in this distress also. He is 'a covert' from this tempest; get into him, and thou shalt be safe. He hath borne all this storm, as far as thou art concerned; abide with him, and not one hurtful drop shall fall upon thee, not one hair of thy head shall be singed with this fire. Hast thou fears? hast thou a sense of the wrath of God for sin? dost thou

fear it will one day fall upon thee and be thy portion? Behold a covert, a sure defence is here provided.

[3.] There is drought, causing barrenness, making the heart as a dry place, as a heath, or a parched wilderness. In reference whereunto Christ is a river of water, abundantly, plentifully flowing for its refreshment. Drought in the Scripture denotes almost all manner of evil, it being the great, distressing punishment of those countries. When God threatens sinners, he says, they 'shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good (or water) cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness;' Jer xvii. 6. he shall be left to barrenness and want of all refreshment. And David complains in his great distress, that his 'moisture was turned into the drought of summer;' Psal. xxxii. 4.

Two things are evidently in this drought: want of grace, or moisture, to make the soul fruitful; and want of rain or consolation to make it joyful. Barrenness and sorrow or disconsolation are in this dry place. Let us then suppose this condition also. Doth the soul find itself like the parched ground? It hath no moisture to enable it to bring forth fruit; but is dry, sapless, all the fruits of the Spirit seem to be withered; faith, love, zeal, delight in God, not one of them flourishes; yea, it thinks they are quite dead, it hath no showers, not any drop of consolation, no refreshment, but pines away under barrenness and sorrow. What would now best suit such a condition? Why turn in a stream of water upon this parched ground, let there be springs in this thirsty place, let 'water break out in the wilderness, and streams in the desert;' as Isa. xxxv. 6. and how will all things be changed? Those things that hung their heads, and had no beauty, will flourish again; and the things that are ready to die will be revived. Why in this condition Jesus Christ will be water, and that in abundance, rivers of water, that there shall be no want. He will by his Spirit give supplies of grace to make the soul fruitful; he will give in consolation to make it joyful.

[4.] There is weariness, and in respect hereof, Christ is said to be 'the shadow of a great rock.' Weariness of travel and labour through heat and drought, is insupportable. He that is to travel in a thirsty land, dry and hungry, the sun

beating on his head, will be ready with Jonah in such a condition to wish he were dead, to be freed of his misery. Oh, how welcome will 'the shadow of a great rock' be to such a poor creature? If Jonah rejoiced in 'the shade of a gourd;' how much better is 'the shadow of a great rock?' Many a poor soul exercised with temptations, hindered in duties, scorched with a sense of sin, is weary in his journeying towards Canaan, in his course of obedience; and thinks with himself, it were better for him even to die, than to live, having no hopes to come to his journey's end. Let now this poor soul lie down and repose himself a little under the shadow and safeguarding protection of this rock of ages, the Lord Jesus Christ, how will his strength and resolution come to him again?

Thus, I say, is Christ in the promises peculiarly suited to all the several distresses, that we may at any time fall into. I might multiply instances to this purpose; but this one may suffice to make good the consideration proposed, for the encouraging of us to believe, from the suiting of the grace in the promises to all our wants.

Two things then may hence be deducted.

1st. The willingness of God that we should be established in believing. To what end should the Lord thus obviate all objections that can possibly arise in a misgiving heart, and accommodate grace in Christ to all perplexities and troubles we at any time lie under, were he not willing we should lay hold on that grace, own it, accept it, and give him the praise of it. If I should go to a poor man, and tell him, Thou art poor, but see here are riches; thou art naked, but here is clothing; thou art hungry and thirsty, here is food and refreshment; thou art wounded, but I have the most precious balm in the world: if I have no intent to have him partake of these riches, food, raiment, medicine, do not I egregiously mock and deride the man's misery and sorrow? will a wise or good man do thus? Though many will deafen their ears to the cries of the poor; yet who almost is so desperately wicked, as to delight himself in sporting at their misery, and increasing their sorrow? And shall we think that the God of heaven, 'the Father of mercy, and God of all consolation,' who is all goodness, sweetness, and truth (as hath been declared), when he doth so suit and temper

his fulness to our wants, and suits his grace in Christ to all our fears and troubles for their removal, doth it to increase our misery, and mock our calamity? I speak of the heirs of promise, to whom they are made and do belong. Is it not time for you to leave disputing, and questioning the sincerity and faithfulness of God in all these engagements? What farther, what greater security can we expect or desire? So that,

2dly. All unbelief must needs be at length totally resolved into the stubbornness of the will. 'You will not come unto me,' saith our Saviour, 'that you may have life.' When all a man's objections are prevented, and answered; when all his wants are suited; when a ground is laid, that all his fears may be removed, and yet he keeps off, and closes not; what can it be, but a mere perverseness of will, that rules him? Doth not such an one say, Let the Lord do what he will, say what he can, though my mouth be stopped, that I have nothing wherewith to wrangle or contend any more, yet I will not believe? Let this then be another motive, or encouragement, which, added to what was spoken before concerning God, even the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, is all I shall insist upon.