

**SERMON IV.\***

THE

**STEADFASTNESS OF PROMISES,**

AND THE

**SINFULNESS OF STAGGERING.**

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\* This sermon was preached before the Parliament, Feb. 28, 1649. being a day set apart for solemn humiliation throughout the nation.

TO  
THE COMMONS OF ENGLAND  
IN  
PARLIAMENT ASSEMBLED.

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SIRS,

THAT God in whose hand your breath is, and whose are all your ways, having caused various seasons to pass over you, and in them all manifested, that his works are truth, and his ways judgment, calls earnestly by them for that walking before him, which is required from them, who with other distinguishing mercies, are interested in the specialty of his protecting providence. As in a view of present enjoyments, to sacrifice to your net, and burn incense to your drag, as though by them, your portion were fat and plenteous, is an exceeding provocation to the eyes of his glory; so to press to the residue of your desires and expectations, by an arm of flesh, the designings and contrivances of carnal reason, with outwardly appearing mediums of their accomplishment, is no less an abomination to him. Though there may be a present sweetness to them that find the life of the hand, yet their latter end will be, to lie down in sorrow. That you might be prevailed on to give glory to God by steadfastness in believing, committing all your ways to him with patience in well-doing, to the contempt of the most varnished appearance of carnal policy, was my peculiar aim in this ensuing Sermon.

That which added ready willingness to my obedience unto your commands for the preaching and pub-

lishing hereof, being a serious proposal for the advancement and propagation of the gospel in another nation, is here again recommended to your thoughts, by

Your most humble servant,

In our common Master,

J. OWEN.

March 8, 1649.

## SERMON IV.

*He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief.—Rom. iv. 20.*

IN the first chapters of this epistle, the apostle, from Scripture, and the constant practice of all sorts of men, of all ages, Jews and Gentiles, wise and barbarians, proves all the world, and every individual therein, to 'have sinned and come short of the glory of God:' and not only so, but that it was utterly impossible, that by their own strength, or by virtue of any assistance communicated, or privileges enjoyed, they should ever attain to a righteousness of their own, that might be acceptable unto God.

Hereupon he concludes that discourse with these two positive assertions: First, That for what is past, 'every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God;' chap. iii. 19. Secondly, For the future, though they should labour to amend their ways, and improve their assistances and privileges to a better advantage than formerly, 'yet by the deeds of the law, shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God;' ver. 20.

Now it being the main drift of the apostle, in this epistle, and in his whole employment, to manifest that God hath not shut up all the sons of men, hopeless and remediless under this condition; he immediately discovers and opens the rich supply, which God in free grace hath made and provided, for the delivery of his own from this calamitous estate, even by the righteousness of faith in Christ, which he unfoldeth, asserteth, proves, and vindicates from objections, to the end of the third chapter.

This being a matter of so great weight, as, comprising in itself the sum of the gospel wherewith he was intrusted; the honour and exaltation of Christ, which above all he desired; the great design of God to be glorious in his saints; and in a word, the chief subject of the ambassage from Christ, to him committed (to wit, that they who neither have, nor by any means can attain a righteousness of their own, by the utmost of their workings, may yet have that which is complete and unrefusable in Christ, by believing), he therefore

strongly confirms it in the fourth chapter, by testimony and example of the Scripture, with the saints that were of old : thereby also declaring, that though the manifestation of this mystery, were now more fully opened by Christ from the bosom of the Father, yet indeed this was the only way for any to appear in the presence of God, ever since sin entered into the world.

To make his demonstrations the more evident, he singeth out one for an example, who was eminently known, and confessed by all to have been the friend of God, to have been righteous and justified before him, and thereon to have held sweet communion with him all his days ; to wit, Abraham, the father according to the flesh, of all those, who put in the strongest of all men for a share in righteousness, by the privileges they did enjoy, and the works they did perform.

Now concerning him, the apostle proves abundantly in the beginning of the fourth chapter, that the justification which he found, and the righteousness he attained, was purely that, and no other, which he before described ; to wit, a righteousness in the forgiveness of sins, through faith in the blood of Christ. Yea, and that all the privileges and exaltations of this Abraham, which made him so signal and eminent among the saints of God, as to be called ‘ the father of the faithful,’ were merely from hence, that this righteousness of grace was freely discovered, and fully established unto him : an enjoyment being granted him in a peculiar manner, by faith of that promise, wherein the Lord Christ, with the whole spring of the righteousness mentioned, was inwrapped. This the apostle pursues with sundry, and various inferences and conclusions, to the end of ver. 17. chap. iv.

Having laid down this, in the next place he gives us a description of that faith of Abraham, whereby he became inheritor of those excellent things, from the adjuncts of it. That as his justification was proposed as an example of God’s dealing with us by his grace, so his faith might be laid down as a pattern for us, in the receiving that grace.

Now this he doth, from

First, The foundation of it, whereon it rested.

Secondly, The matter of it, what he believed.

Thirdly, The manner of it, or how he believed.

First, From the bottom and foundation on which it rested, viz. The omnipotency or all-sufficiency of God, whereby he was able to fulfil whatever he had engaged himself unto by promise, and which he called him to believe, ver. 14. 'He believed him who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not, as though they were.'

Two great testimonies are here of the power of God :

1. That 'he quickeneth the dead : ' able he is to raise up those that are dead to life again.

2. 'He calleth things that are not, as though they were : ' by his very call or word, gives being to those things which before were not : as when he said, 'Let there be light, there was light ; ' Gen. i. 3. by that very word, 'commanding light to shine out of darkness ; ' 2 Cor. iv. 6.

These demonstrations of God's all-sufficiency he considereth in peculiar reference to what he was to believe ; to wit, that 'he might be the father of many nations ; ' ver. 11. of the Jews according 'to the flesh,' of Jews and Gentiles, according to the faith whereof we speak. For the first, his 'body being now dead, and Sarah's womb dead,' ver. 19. he rests on God 'as quickening the dead,' in believing that he 'shall be the father of many nations.' For the other, that he should be a father of the Gentiles by faith, the Holy Ghost witnesseth that they 'were not a people ; ' Hos. ii. 23. the implanting of them in his stock, must be by a power, 'that calleth things that are not, as though they were : ' giving a new nature and being unto them, which before they had not.

To bottom ourselves upon the all-sufficiency of God, for the accomplishment of such things as are altogether impossible to any thing, but that all-sufficiency, is faith indeed, and worthy our imitation. It is also the wisdom of faith, to pitch peculiarly on that in God, which is accommodated to the difficulties wherewith it is to wrestle. Is Abraham to believe, that from his dead body must spring a whole nation ? He rests on God, as 'he that quickeneth the dead.'

Secondly, His faith is commended from the matter of it, or what he did believe ; which is said in general to be 'the

promise of God ;' ver. 20. 'He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief.' And particularly the matter of that promise is pointed at, ver. 11. 18. 'that he should be 'the father of many nations;' that was his being a 'father of many nations,' of having 'all nations blessed in his seed.' A matter entangled with a world of difficulties, considering the natural inability of his body, and the body of Sarah, to be parents of children. But, when God calls for believing, his truth and all-sufficiency being engaged, no difficulty, nor seeming impossibilities, that the thing to be believed is, or may be attended withal, ought to be of any weight with us : he who hath promised, is able.

Thirdly, From the manner of his believing, which is expressed four ways.

1. 'Against hope, he believed in hope;' ver. 18. Here is a twofold hope mentioned ; one that was against him, the other that was for him.

(1.) He believed against hope, that is, when all arguments that might beget hope in him, were against him. Against hope is against all motives unto hope whatever. All reasons of natural hope were against him. What hope could arise in, or by reason, that two dead bodies should be the source and fountain of many nations ? so that against all inducements of a natural hope he believed.

(2.) He 'believed in hope;' that is, such hope as arose as his faith did, from the consideration of God's all-sufficiency. This is an adjunct of his faith, it was such a faith as had hope adjoined with it. And this believing in hope when all reasons of hope were away, is the first thing that is set down, of the manner of his faith. In a decay of all natural helps, the deadness of all means, an appearance of an utter impossibility, that ever the promise should be accomplished, then to believe with unfeigned hope, is a commendable faith.

2. He 'was not weak in faith;' ver. 19. *μὴ ἀσθενήσας*, 'minime debilis,' Beza. He was by 'no means weak : ' a negation, that by a figure, *μείωσις*, doth strongly assert the contrary, to that which is denied. He was no way weak ; that is, he was very strong in faith, as is afterward expressed, ver. 20. 'He was strong in faith, giving glory to God.' And the apostle tells you, wherein this his not weakness did ap-

pear: saith he, 'He considered not his own body being now dead, when he was about a hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb;' ver. 19. It was seen in this, that his faith carried him above the consideration of all impediments, that might lie in the way to the accomplishment of the promise.

It is mere weakness of faith, that makes a man lie poring on the difficulties and seeming impossibilities that lie upon the promise. We think it our wisdom, and our strength, to consider, weigh, and look into the bottom of oppositions, and temptations, that arise against the promise. Perhaps it may be the strength of our fleshly, carnal reason; but certainly it is the weakness of our faith. He that is strong in faith will not so much as debate, or consider the things, that cast the greatest seeming improbability, yea impossibility, on the fulfilling of the promise: it will not afford a debate or dispute of the cause, nor any consideration. 'Being not weak in faith, he considered not.'

3. He 'was fully persuaded;' ver. 21. πληροφορηθεῖς, 'persuasionis plenus.' This is the third thing that is observed in the manner of his believing. He fully, quietly, resolvedly cast himself on this, that 'he who had promised was able to perform it.' As a ship at sea (for so the word imports), looking about, and seeing storms and winds arising, sets up all her sails, and with all speed makes to the harbour. Abraham seeing the storms of doubts and temptations likely to rise against the promise made unto him, with full sail breaks through all, to lie down quietly in God's all-sufficiency.

4. The last is, that 'he staggered not;' ver. 20. This is that which I have chosen to insist on unto you, as a choice part of the commendation of Abraham's faith, which is proposed for our imitation: 'He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief.'

The words may be briefly resolved into this doctrinal proposition:

*Observation.* All staggering at the promises of God is from unbelief.

What is of any difficulty in the text, will be cleared in opening the parts of the observation.

Men are apt to pretend sundry other reasons and causes



of their staggering. The promises do not belong unto them, God intends not their souls in them, they are not such and such, and this makes them stagger; when the truth is, it is their unbelief, and that alone, that puts them into this staggering condition. As in other things, so in this, we are apt to have many fair pretences for foul faults. To lay the burden on the right shoulders, I shall demonstrate, by God's assistance, that it is not this, or that, but unbelief alone, that makes us stagger at the promises.

To make this the more plain, I must open these two things:

I. What is the promise here intended.

II. What it is to stagger at the promise.

I. The promise here mentioned is principally that which Abraham believing, it was said eminently, that 'it was accounted to him for righteousness.' So the apostle tells us, ver. 5. of this chapter: when this was, you may see Gen. xv. 6. there it is affirmed, that 'he believed the Lord, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' That which God had there spoken to him of, was about 'the multiplying of his seed as the stars of heaven, whereas he was yet childless.'

The last verse of chap. xiv. leaves Abraham full of earthly glory. He had newly conquered five kings with all their host, was honoured by the king of Sodom, and blessed by the king of Salem; and yet in the first verse of chap. xv. God 'appearing to him in a vision,' in the very entrance bids him 'fear not:' plainly intimating, that notwithstanding all his outward success and glory, he had still many perplexities upon his spirit, and had need of great consolation and establishment. Abraham was not clear in the accomplishment of former promises about the blessed seed, and so though he have all outward advancements, yet he cannot rest in them. Until a child of God be clear in the main, in the matter of the great promise, the business of Christ, the greatest outward successes and advantages, will be so far from quieting and settling his mind, that they rather increase his perplexities. They do but occasion him to cry, Here is this, and that; here is victory, and success; here is wealth, and peace; but here is not Christ.

That this was Abraham's condition, appears from ver. 2.

of that chapter, where God having told him, that he was his shield and his exceeding great reward: he replies, 'Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?' As if he should have said, Lord God, thou toldest me when I was in Haran, now nineteen years ago, that in me and 'my seed, all the families of the earth should be blessed;' Gen. xii. 3. that the blessed, blessing seed, should be of me: but now I wax old, all appearances grow up against the direct accomplishment of that word, and it was that, which above all in following thee I aimed at: if I am disappointed therein, what shall I do? and what will all these things avail me? what will it benefit me, to have a multitude of earthly enjoyments, and leave them in the close to my servant?

I cannot but observe, that this sighing, mournful complaint of Abraham, hath much infirmity, and something of diffidence, mixed with it. He shakes in the very bottom of his soul, that improbabilities were growing up, as he thought, to impossibilities, against him, in the way of promise. Yet hence also mark these two things: First, That he doth not repine in himself, and keep up his burning thoughts in his breast, but sweetly breathes out the burden of his soul, into the bosom of his God. 'Lord God,' saith he, 'what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?' It is of sincere faith, to unlade our unbelief in the bosom of our God. Secondly, That God takes not his servant at the advantage of his complaining and diffidence: but lets that pass, until having renewed the promise to him, and settled his faith, then he gives in his testimony, that he believed God. The Lord overlooks the weakness, and causeless wailings of his, takes them at the best, and then gives his witness to them.

This, I say, was the promise whereof we spake: that he should have a seed of his own, 'like the stars that cannot be numbered;' Gen. xv. 4, 5. And herein are contained three things.

1. The purely spiritual part of it, that concerned his own soul in Christ. God engaging about his seed minds him of his own interest in that seed which brings the blessing. Jesus Christ, with his whole mediation, and his whole work of redemption, is in this promise, with the enjoyment of

God in covenant, 'as a shield, and as an exceeding great reward.'

2. The kingdom of Christ, in respect of the propagation and establishment of it, with the multitude of his subjects, that also is in this promise.

3. The temporal part of it, multitudes of children to a childless man, and an heir from his own bowels.

Now this promise, in these three branches, takes up your whole interest, comprises all you are to believe for : be you considered either as believers, or as rulers. As believers : so your interest lies in these two things : That your own souls have a share and portion in the Lord Christ ; and that the kingdom of the Lord Jesus be exalted and established. As rulers : That peace and prosperity may be the inheritance of the nation, is in your desires. Look upon this in subordination to the kingdom of Christ, and so all these are in this promise.

To make this more plain, these being the three main things that you aim at, I shall lay before you three promises, suited to these several things, which, or the like, you are to view in all your actings, all staggering at them, being from unbelief.

The first thing you are to believe for, is the interest of your own souls in the covenant of grace, by Christ. As to this I shall only point unto that promise of the covenant, Heb. viii. 12. 'I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins, and their iniquities I will remember no more.'

The second is the establishment of the kingdom of Christ, in despite of all opposition. And for this amongst innumerable, take that of Isa. lx. 11. 'Therefore thy gates shall be open continually, they shall not be shut day nor night, that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought ; for the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish.'

The quiet and peace of the nation, which ye regard as rulers, as it stands in subordination to the kingdom of Christ, comes also under the promise, for which take that of Jer. xxx. 20, 21.

These being your three main aims, let your eye be fixed on these three, or the like promises ; for in the demonstra-

tion and the use of the point, I shall carry along all three together, desiring that what is instanced in any one, may be always extended to both the other.

II. What is it to stagger at the promise. 'He staggered not,' οὐ διεκρίθη, 'he disputed not:' διακρίνομαι is properly to make use of our own judgment and reason, in discerning of things, of what sort they be. It is sometimes rendered, 'to doubt;' Matt. xxi. 21. 'If you have faith,' καὶ μὴ διακρίσητε, 'and doubt not:' that is, not use arguings and reasonings in yourselves concerning the promise and things promised. Sometimes it simply denotes to discern a thing as it is: so the word is used 1 Cor. xi. 29. διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα, 'discerning the body.' In the sense wherein it is here used, as also Matt. xxi. 21. it holds out, as I said, a self-consultation and dispute, concerning those contrary things that are proposed to us. So also Acts x. 20. Peter is commanded to obey the vision, μηδὲν δακρινόμενος, 'nothing doubting.' What is that? Why, a not continuing to do, what he is said to have done, ver. 17. 'He doubted in himself what the vision he had seen should mean:' he rolled and disputed it in his own thoughts; he staggered at it.

To stagger then at the promise, is to take into consideration the promise itself, and withal, all the difficulties that lie in the way for the accomplishment of it, as to a man's own particular, and there so to dispute it in his thoughts, as not fully to cast it off, nor fully to close with it. For instance, the soul considers the promise of free grace in the blood of Jesus, looks upon it, weighs, as well as it is able, the truth of God, who make the promise, with those other considerations, which might lead the heart to rest firmly upon it; but withal, takes into his thoughts his own unworthiness, sinfulness, unbelief, hypocrisy, and the like; which as he supposes, powerfully stave off the efficacy of the promise from him. Hence he knows not what to conclude: if he add a grain of faith, the scale turns on the side of the promise; the like quantity of unbelief makes it turn upon him; and what to do he knows not: let go the promise he cannot, take fast hold he dares not; but here he staggers, and wavers to and fro.

Thus the soul comes to be like Paul, in another case, Phil. i. 23. He considered his own advantage on the one

side by his dissolution, and the profit of the churches by his abiding in the flesh, on the other; and taking in these various thoughts, he cries out, he is in a strait, he staggered, he was betwixt two, and knew not which to choose: or as David, 2 Sam.' xxiv. 14. when he had a tender of several corrections made to him, says, 'I am in a great strait;' he sees evil in every one, and knows not which to choose.

A poor creature looking upon the promise, sees, as he supposes, in a steadfast closing with the promise, that there lies presumption; on the other hand, certain destruction, if he believes not; and now he staggers, he is in a great strait: arguments arise on both sides, he knows not how to determine them, and so hanging in suspense, he staggereth. Like a man travelling a journey, and meeting with two several paths, that promise both fairly, and he knows not which is his proper way; he guesses, and guesses, and at length cries, Well, I know not which of these ways I should go; but this is certain, if I mistake I am undone; I'll go in neither, but here I'll sit down, and not move one step in either of them, until some one come, that can give me direction. The soul very frequently sits down in this hesitation, and refuses to step one step forward, till God come mightily and lead out the spirit to the promise, or the devil turn it aside to unbelief.

It is as a thing of small weight in the air: the weight that it hath, carries it downwards; and the air, with some breath of wind, bears it up again, so that it waves to and fro: sometimes it seems as though it would fall, by its own weight; and sometimes again, as though it would mount quite out of sight; but poized between both it tosseth up and down, without any great gaining either way. The promise draws the soul upward, and the weight of its unbelief sinks it downward: sometimes the promise attracts so powerfully, you would think the heart quite drawn up into it: and sometimes again unbelief presses down, that you would think it gone for ever; but neither prevails utterly, the poor creature swaggs between both, this is to stagger. Like the two disciples going to Emmaus, Luke xxiv. 14. 'They talked together of the things that had happened,' debated the business, and ver. 22. they gave up the result

of their thoughts. They ‘trusted it had been he that should have redeemed Israel;’ they trusted once, but now seeing him slain and crucified, they know not what to say to it. What then? do they quite give over all trusting in him? No, they cannot do so, ver. 23—25. Certain women had astonished them, and affirmed that he was risen; yea, and others also going to his grave found it so: hereupon they ‘have communication within themselves and are sad,’ ver. 17. that is, they staggered, they were in a staggering condition: much appears for them, something against them, they know not what to do.

A poor soul, that hath been long perplexed in trouble and anxiety of mind, finds a sweet promise, Christ in a promise suited to all his wants, coming with mercy to pardon him, with love to embrace him, with blood to purge him, and is raised up to roll himself in some measure upon this promise; on a sudden terrors arise, temptations grow strong, new corruptions break out, Christ in the promise dies to him, Christ in the promise is slain, is in the grave as to him; so that he can only sigh, and say, I trusted for deliverance by Christ, but now all is gone again, I have little or no hope, Christ in the promise is slain to me. What then? shall he give over, never more inquire after this buried Christ, but sit down in darkness and sorrow? No, he cannot do so: this morning some new arguments of Christ’s appearance again upon the soul are made out; Christ is not for ever lost to him. What does he then? Steadfastly believe he cannot, totally give over he will not; he staggers, he is full of self-communications, and is sad. This it is, to stagger at the promise of God.

I come now to prove, that notwithstanding any pretences whatever, all this staggering is from unbelief.

The two disciples, whom we now mentioned, that staggered and disputed between themselves in their journey to Emmaus, thought they had a good reason, and a sufficient appearing cause of all their doubtings. ‘We hoped,’ say they, ‘that it was he that should have delivered Israel. What do they now stand at? Alas! the ‘chief-priests and rulers have condemned him to death, and crucified him;’ Luke xxiv. 20. And is it possible that deliverance should arise from a crucified man? this makes them stagger. But when our Saviour

himself draws nigh to them, and gives them the ground of all this, he tells them it is all from hence; they 'are foolish and slow of heart to believe;' ver. 25. Here is the rise of all their doubtings, even their unbelief. Whilst you are slow of heart to believe, do not once think of establishment.

Peter venturing upon the waves at the command of Christ, Matt. xiv. seeing the 'wind to grow boisterous,' ver. 29. he also hath a storm within, and cries out, Oh, save me! What was now the cause of Peter's fear, and crying out? Why the wind and sea grew boisterous, and he was ready to sink; no such thing, but merely unbelief, want of faith; ver. 31. 'O thou of little faith,' saith our Saviour, 'wherefore didst thou doubt?' It was not the great winds, but thy little faith that made thee stagger. And in three or four other places, upon several occasions, doth our Saviour lay all the wavering and staggering of his followers, as to any promised mercy upon this score, as Matt. vi. 30. and viii. 26.

Isa. vii. Ahaz being afraid of the combination of Syria and Ephraim against him, received a promise of deliverance by Isaiah; ver. 7. Whereupon the prophet tells him, and all Judah, that 'if they will not believe, surely they shall not be established;' ver. 9. He doth not say, If Damascus and Ephraim be not broken, you shall not be established; no, he doth not stick there; the fear that you will not be established ariseth merely from your unbelief, that keeps you off from closing with the promise, which would certainly bring you establishment.

And this is the sole reason the apostle gives, why the word of promise being preached becomes unprofitable, even because of unbelief. 'It was not mixed with faith;' Heb. iv. 2.

But these things will be more clear under the demonstration of the points, which are two.

1. When a man doubts, hesitates, and disputes, any thing in himself, his reasonings must have their rise, either from something within himself, or from something in the things concerning which he staggereth; either '*certitudo mentis*,' 'the assurance of his mind;' or '*certitudo entis*,' the 'certainty of the thing itself,' is wanting. He that doubteth whether his friend in a far country be alive or not, his stag-

gering ariseth from the uncertainty of the thing itself; when that is made out, he is resolved, as it was with Jacob in the case of Joseph. But he that doubteth, whether the needle in the compass, being touched with the loadstone, will turn northward, all the uncertainty is in his own mind.

When men stagger at the promises, this must arise either from within themselves, or some occasion must be administered hereunto from the promise. If from within themselves, that can be nothing but unbelief; an inbred obstacle to closing with, and resting on, the promise; that is unbelief. If then we demonstrate that there is nothing in the promise, either as to matter, or manner, or any attendency of it, that should occasion any such staggering, we lay the burden and blame on the right shoulders, the sin of staggering on unbelief.

Now that any occasion is not administered, nor cause given, of this staggering from the promise, will appear, if we consider seriously whence any such occasion or cause should arise. All the stability of a promise depends upon the qualifications of the promiser, to the ends and purposes of the promise. If a man make me a promise to do such and such things for me, and I question, whether ever it will be so or not; it must be from a doubt of the want of one of these things in him that makes the promise; either (1.) of truth; or (2.) of ability to make good his word, because of the difficulty of the thing itself; or (3.) of sincerity to intend me really, what he speaks of; or (4.) of constant memory to take the opportunity of doing the thing intended; or (5.) of stableness to be still of the same mind. Now if there be no want of any of these in him whose promises we speak of, there is then certainly no ground of our staggering, but only from our own unbelief.

Let us now see whether any of these things be wanting to the promises of God; and begin we with the first.

(1.) Is there truth in these promises? If there be the least occasion in the world to suspect the truth of the promises, or the veracity of the promiser, then may our staggering at them arise from thence, and not from our own unbelief. On this ground it is, that all human faith, that is bot-tomed merely on the testimony of man, is at best but a probable opinion; for every man is a liar, and possibly may lie



in that very thing he is engaged to us in. Though a good man will not do so to save his life ; yet it is possible, he may be tempted, he may do so. But now the author of the promises whereof we speak, is truth itself, the God of truth. Who hath taken this as his special attribute, to distinguish him from all others. He is the very God of truth ; and holds out this very attribute in a special manner, in this very thing, in making of his promise : ‘ he is faithful to forgive us our sins ;’ 1 John i 9. Whence his word is said not only to be true, but ‘ truth,’ John xvii. 19. truth itself. ‘ All flesh is as grass, but his word abideth for ever ;’ Isa. xlv. 1.

But yet farther, that it may be evident, that from hence there can be no occasion of staggering, this God of truth, whose word is truth, hath in his infinite wisdom condescended to our weakness, and used all possible means to cause us to apprehend the truth of his promises. The Lord might have left us in the dark, to have gathered out his mind and will towards us from obscure expressions ; and knowing of what value his kindness is, it might justly be expected that we should do so. Men in misery are glad to lay hold of the least word that drops from him, that can relieve them, and to take courage and advantage upon it. As the servants of Benhadad watched diligently, what would fall from the mouth of Ahab concerning their master, then in fear of death ; and when he had occasionally called him his brother, they presently laid hold of it, and cry, ‘ Thy brother Benhadad ;’ 1 Kings xx. 33. God might have left us, and yet have manifested much free grace, to have gathered up falling crumbs, or occasional droppings of mercy, and supply, that we should have rejoiced to have found out one word looking that way ; but to shut up all objections, and to stop for ever the mouth of unbelief, he hath not only spoken plainly, but hath condescended to use all the ways of confirming the truth of what he says and speaks, that ever were in use among the sons of men.

There be four ways, whereby men seek to obtain credit to what they speak, as an undoubted truth, that there may be no occasion of staggering.

[1.] By often averring and affirming of the same thing. When a man says the same thing again and again, it is a sign that he speaks the truth, or at least that he would be

thought so to do. Yea, if an honest man do clearly, fully, plainly, often engage himself to us in the same thing, we count it a vile jealousy not to believe the real truth of his intentions. Now the Lord in his promises often speaks the same things, he speaks once and twice. There is not any thing that he hath promised us, but he hath done it again and again. For instance, as if he should say, ‘I will be merciful to your sins,’ I pray believe me, for, ‘I will pardon your iniquities,’ yea, it shall be so, ‘I will blot out your transgressions as a cloud.’

There is not any want, whereunto we are liable, but thus he hath dealt concerning it. As his command is line upon line, so is his promise. And this is one way whereby God causeth the truth of his promises to appear. To take away all colour of staggering, he speaks once, yea twice, if we will hear.

[2.] The second way of confirming any truth, is by an oath. Though we fear the truth of some men in their assertions, yet when once they come to swear any thing in justice and judgment, there are very few so knowingly profligate, and past all sense of God, but that their asseverations do gain credit, and pass for truth. Hence the apostle tells us, Heb. vi. 16. that ‘an oath for confirmation is to men an end of all strife.’ Though the truth be before ambiguous and doubtful, yet when any interposes with an oath, there is no more contest amongst men. That nothing may be wanting to win our belief to the promises of God, he hath taken this course also, he hath sworn to their truth. Heb. vi. 13. ‘When God made promises to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater he sware by himself.’ He confirms his promise by an oath. ‘O, *fælices nos, quorum causa Deus jurat; ô infælices, si nec juranti Deo credimus!*’ When Christ came, ‘in whom all the promises of God are yea and amen,’ to make sure work of the truth of them, he is confirmed in his administrations by an oath. Heb. vii. 21. ‘He was made a priest by an oath, by him that said, The Lord sware, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever.’ Now, I pray, what is the cause of this great condescension in the God of heaven, to confirm that word, which in itself is truth, by an oath? The apostle satisfies us as to the end aimed at, Heb. vi. 17, 18. This was, saith he, the aim of God

herein, that his people seeing him engaged, by two such immutable things, as his promise and his oath, may be assured that there is an utter impossibility, that any one word of his should come short of its truth; or, that they firmly resting upon it should be deceived thereby. And this is a second way.

[3.] Another course, whereby men confirm the truth of what they speak, is by entering into covenant, to accomplish what they have spoken. A covenant gives strength to the truth of any engagement. When a man hath but told you he will do such and such things for you, you are full of doubts and fears, that he may break with you; but when he hath indented in a covenant, and you can shew it under his hand and seal, you look upon that, consider that, and are very secure. Even this way also hath the Lord taken to confirm and establish his truths and promises, that all doubtings and staggerings may be excluded, he hath wrapped them all up in a covenant, and brought himself into a federal engagement, that upon every occasion, and at every temptation, we may draw out his hand and seal, and say to Satan and our own false hearts; See here, behold God engaged in covenant, to make good the word, wherein he hath caused me to put my trust; and this is his property, that he is a God keeping covenant. So that having his promise redoubled, and that confirmed by an oath, all sealed and made sure by an unchangeable covenant, what can we require more, to assure us of the truth of these things? But yet farther;

[4.] In things of very great weight and concernment, such as whereon lives, and the peace of nations does depend, men use to give hostages, for the securing each other of the faith and truth of all their engagements, that they may be mutual pledges of their truth and fidelity. Neither hath the Lord left this way unused to confirm his promise. He hath given us a hostage to secure us of his truth, one exceedingly dear to him, one always in his bosom, of whose honour he is as careful, as of his own. Jesus Christ is the great hostage of his Father's truth, the pledge of his fidelity in his promises. God hath set him forth, and given him to us for this end. 'Behold the Lord himself shall give you a sign' (a sign that he will fulfil his word), 'a virgin shall conceive and bear

a son, and shall call his name Immanuel;’ Isa. vii. 14. That you may be assured of my truth, the virgin’s Son shall be a hostage of it. ‘In him are all the promises of God yea and amen.’ Thus also to his saints he gives the farther hostage of his Spirit, and the first-fruits of glory; that the full accomplishment of all his promises may be contracted in a little, and presented to their view. As the Israelites had the pleasures of Canaan in the clusters of grapes, brought from thence.

Now from all this it is apparent, not only that there is truth in all the promises of God, but also that truth so confirmed, so made out, established, that not the least occasion imaginable is thence administered to staggering or doubting. He that disputes the promises, and knows not how to close with them, must find out another cause of his so doing; as to the truth of the promise, there is no doubt at all, nor place for any.

(2.) But secondly, though there be truth in the promise, yet there may want ability in the promiser to accomplish the thing promised, because of its manifold difficulties. This may be a second cause of staggering, if the thing itself engaged for be not compassable, by the ability of the engager. As if a skilful physician should promise a sick man recovery from his disease, though he could rely upon the truth and sincerity of his friend, yet he cannot but question his ability as to this, knowing that to cure the least distemper is not absolutely in his power; but when he promises, who is able to perform, then all doubting in this kind is removed. See then whether it be so, in respect of these promises whereof we speak. When God comes to Abraham to engage himself in that covenant of grace, from whence flow all the promises whereof we treat, he lays this down as the bottom of all; ‘I am,’ saith he, ‘God Almighty,’ Gen. xvii. 1. or ‘God all-sufficient,’ very well able to go through with whatever I promise. When difficulties, temptations, and troubles arise, remember who it is that hath promised; not only he that is true and faithful, but he that is God Almighty, before whom nothing can stand, when he will accomplish his word. And that this was a bottom of great confidence to Abraham, the apostle tells you, Rom. iv. 21. ‘Being fully persuaded that he who had promised, was able also to per-

form.' When God is engaged by his word, his ability is especially to be eyed. The soul is apt to ask, How can this be? it is impossible it should be so to me; but, 'he is able that hath promised.' And this, Rom. xi. 23. the same apostle holds out to us, to fix our faith upon, in reference to that great promise of recalling the Jews, and re-implanting them into the vine. 'God,' saith he, 'is able to graft them in;' though now they seem as dead bones, yet the Lord knows they may live; for he is able to breathe upon them, and make them terrible as an army with banners. Yea, so excellent is this all-sufficiency, this ability of God to accomplish his whole word, that the apostle cautions us, that we do not bound it, as though it could go so far only, or so far. Nay, saith he, Ephes. iii. 20. 'He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think.'

When men come to close with the promise indeed, to make a life upon it, they are very ready to question and inquire, whether it be possible that ever the word of it should be made good to them. He that sees a little boat swimming at sea, observes no great difficulty in it, looks upon it without any solicitousness of mind at all, beholds how it tosses up and down, without any fears of its sinking. But now, let this man commit his own life to sea in that bottom, what inquiries will he make? what a search into the vessel? Is it possible, saith he, this little thing should safeguard my life in the ocean? It is so with us, in our view of the promises; whilst we consider them at large, as they lie in the word; alas! they are all true, all yea and amen, shall be all accomplished; but when we go to venture our souls upon a promise, in an ocean of wrath and temptations, then every blast we think will overturn it; it will not bear us above all these waves. Is it possible we should swim safely upon the plank of a pinnacle in the midst of the ocean?

Now here we are apt to deceive ourselves, and mistake the whole thing in question, which is the bottom of many corrupted reasonings and perplexed thoughts. We inquire whether it can be so to us, as the word holds out; when the truth is, the question is not about the nature of the thing, but about the power of God. Place the doubt aright, and it is this: Is God able to accomplish what he hath spoken? Can he heal my backslidings? Can he pardon my sins?

Can he save my soul? Now that there may be no occasion, nor colour of staggering upon this point, you see God reveals himself as an all-sufficient God, as one that is able to go through with all his engagements. If you will stagger, you may so do; this is certain, you have no cause to do so from hence; there is not any promise that ever God entered into, but he is able to perform it.

But you will say, Though God be thus able, thus all-sufficient, yet may there not be defects in the means whereby he worketh? As a man may have a strong arm able to strike his enemies to the ground, but yet if he strike with a feather, or a straw, it will not be done; not for want of strength in his arm, but of fitness and suitableness in the instrument, whereby he acteth. But,

[1.] God using instruments, they do not act according to their own virtue, but according to the influence of virtue by him to them communicated. Look to what end soever God is pleased to use any means, his choosing of them fills them with efficacy to that purpose. Let the way and means of accomplishing what thou expectest by the promise be in themselves never so weak, yet know, that from God's choosing of them to that end, they shall be filled with virtue and efficacy to the accomplishment of it.

[2.] It is expressly affirmed of the great mediums of the promise, that they also are able; that there is no want of power in them, for the accomplishment of the thing promised.

1st. There is the means procuring it, and that is Jesus Christ: the promises, as to the good things contained in them, are all purchased by him. And of him, the apostle affirms expressly, that 'he is able to save to the uttermost them that come to God by him;' Heb. v. 27. No want here, no defect; he is 'able to do it to the uttermost; able to save them that are tempted;' Heb. ii. 18.

2dly. There is the great means of manifestation, and that is the word of God. And of this also it is affirmed, that it is able. It hath an all-sufficiency in its kind. Paul tells the elders of Ephesus, that the 'word of grace is able to build them up, and to give them an inheritance among them that are sanctified;' Acts xx. 32.

3dly. There is the great means of operation, and that is the Spirit of grace. He works the mercy of the promise upon

the soul. He also is able, exceeding powerful, to effect the end appointed. He hath no bounds, nor measure of operation, his own will; 1 Cor. xii. 11.

Hence then it is apparent in the second place, that there is no occasion for doubting; yea, that all staggering is excluded, from the consideration of the ability of the promiser, and the means whereby he worketh. If thou continuest to stagger, thou must get a better plea than this, It cannot be, it is impossible: I tell thee nay, but God is able to accomplish the whole word of his promise. But,

(3.) There may be want of sincerity in promises and engagements, which whilst we do but suspect, we cannot choose but stagger at them. If a man make a promise to me, and I can suppose that he intends not as he says, but hath reserves to himself of another purpose, I must needs doubt, as to the accomplishment of what he hath spoken. If the soul may surmise, that the Lord intends not him sincerely in his promise, but reserves some other thing in his mind, or that it shall be so to others and not to him, he must needs dispute in himself, stagger, and keep off from believing. This then must be demonstrated in the third place: that the promises of God, and God in all his promises, are full of sincerity, so that none need fear to cast himself on them; they shall be real unto him. Now concerning this observe,

[1.] That God's promises are not declarative of his secret purposes and intentions. When God holds out to any a promise of the pardon of sin, this doth not signify to any singular man, that it is the purpose of God, that his sin shall be pardoned. For if so, then either all men must be pardoned, to whom the word of promise comes, which is not; or else God fails of his purposes, and comes short of his intendments; which would render him, either impotent, that he could not; or mutable, that he would not establish them: but 'who hath resisted his will?' Rom. ix. 19. 'He is the Lord, and he changeth not;' Mal. iii. 6. So that though every one, to whom the promise is held out, hath not the fruit of the promise; yet this derogates not at all, from the sincerity of God in his promises; for he doth not hold them forth to any such end and purpose, as to declare his intentions concerning particular persons.

[2.] There are some absolute promises, comprehensive of the covenant of grace, which, as to all those that belong to that covenant, do hold out thus much of the mind of God, that they shall certainly be accomplished in, and towards them all. The soul may freely be invited to venture on these promises, with assurance of their efficacy towards him.

[3.] This God principally declares in all his promises of his mind and purpose, that every soul, to whom they shall come, may freely rest on, to wit; that faith in the promises, and the accomplishment of the promises, are inseparable. He that believeth shall enjoy. This is most certain, this God declares of his mind, his heart towards us, that as for all the good things he hath spoken of to us, it shall be to us according to our faith. This I say the promises of God do signify of his purpose, that the believer of them shall be the enjoyer of them: in them, 'the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith;' Rom. i. 17. From the faith of God revealing, to the faith of man receiving. So that upon the making out of any promise, you may safely conclude, that upon believing, the mercy, the Christ, the deliverance of this promise is mine. It is true, if a man stand disputing and staggering, whether he have any share in a promise, and close not with it by faith, he may come short of it; and yet without the least impeachment of the truth of the promise, or sincerity of the promiser; for God hath not signified by them, that men shall enjoy the good things of them, whether they believe, or not. Thus far the promises of grace are general, and carry a truth to all, that there is an inviolable connexion between believing, and the enjoyment of the things in them contained. And in this truth is the sincerity of the promiser, which can never be questioned without sin and folly. And this wholly shuts up the spirit from any occasion of staggering. 'O ye of little faith! wherefore do ye doubt?' Ah! lest our share be not in this promise; lest we are not intended in it. Poor creatures! there is but this one way of keeping you off from it, that is, disputing it in yourselves by unbelief. Here lies the sincerity of God towards thee, that believing, thou shalt not come short of what thou aimest at. Here then is no room for staggering. If proclamation be made, granting pardon to all such rebels as



shall come in by such a season ; do men use to stand questioning whether the state bear them any good will, or not ? No, saith the poor creature, I will cast myself upon their faith and truth engaged in their proclamation, whatever I have deserved in particular, I know they will be faithful in their promises. The gospel proclamation is of pardon to all comers in, to all believers : it is not for thee, poor staggerer, to question what is the intendment towards thee in particular, but roll thyself on this, there is an absolute sincerity in the engagement which thou mayest freely rest upon. But,

(4.) Though all be present, truth, power, sincerity ; yet if he that makes the promise should forget, this were a ground of staggering. Pharaoh's butler, without doubt, made large promises to Joseph, and probably spake the truth according to his present intention : afterward standing in the presence of Pharaoh, restored to favour, he had doubtless power enough to have procured the liberty of a poor innocent prisoner ; but yet this would not do, it did not profit Joseph, because, as the text says, ' he did not remember Joseph, but forgot him ;' Gen. xl. 23. This forgetting made all other things useless. But neither hath this the least colour in divine promises. It was Zion's infirmity to say, ' The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me ;' Isa. xlix. 14. For, saith the Lord, ' Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb ? Yea, they may forget, but I will not forget thee : behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands, and thy walls are continually before me ;' ver. 15, 16.

The causes of forgetfulness are,

[1.] Want of love. The things that men love not, they care not for : the matters of their love are continually in their thoughts. Now, says God to Zion, Why sayest thou ' I have forgotten thee ?' Is it for want of love ? Alas ! the love of a most tender mother to her sucking child comes infinitely short of my love to thee. My love to thee is more fixed than so, and how shouldest thou be out of my mind ? How shouldest thou be forgotten ? Infinite love will have infinite thoughtfulness and remembrance.

[2.] Multiplicity of business. This with men is a cause

of forgetting. I had done, says one, as I promised, but multiplicity of occasions thrust it out of my mind, I pray, excuse me. Alas! though I rule all the world, yet, 'thou art graven upon the palms of my hands, and therefore thy walls are continually before me.' See also Psal. lxxvii. 9. Neither then is there as to this the least colour given us to stagger at the promise of God.

(5.) But lastly, where all other things concur, yet if the person promising be changeable, if he may alter his resolution, a man may justly doubt and debate in himself, the accomplishment of any promise made to him. It is true, may he say, he now speaks his heart and mind, but who can say he will be of this mind to-morrow? May he not be turned, and then what becomes of the golden mountains that I promised myself upon his engagement? Wherefore, in the last place, the Lord carefully rejects all sinful surmises concerning the least change or alteration in him, or any of his engagements. 'He is the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, nor shadow of turning;' James i. 18. No shadow, no appearance of any such thing. 'I am the Lord,' saith he, 'I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed;' Mal. iii. 6. The Lord knows, that if any thing in us might prevail with him to alter the word that is gone out of his mouth, we should surely perish. We are poor provoking creatures, therefore he lays our not being consumed only on this, even his own unchangeableness. This we may rest upon, he is of one mind, and who can turn him?

And in these observations have I given you the first demonstration of the point: all staggering is from our own unbelief.

2. The experience which we have of the mighty workings of God, for the accomplishment of all his promises, gives light unto this thing. We have found it true, that where he is once engaged, he will certainly go through unto the appointed issue, though it stand him in the laying out of his power and wisdom to the uttermost. Hab. iii. 9. 'Thy bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, thy word.' If God's oath be passed, and his word engaged, he will surely accomplish it, though it cost him the 'making

of his bow quite naked,' the manifestation of his power to the utmost.

It is true, never did any wait upon God for the accomplishment and fulfilling of a promise, but he found many difficulties fall out between the word and the thing. So was it with Abraham in the business of a son: and so with David in the matter of a kingdom. God will have his promised mercies to fall as the dews upon the parched, gasping earth; or 'as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land,' Isa. xxxii. 2. very welcome unto the traveller, who hath had the sun beat upon his head in his travel all the day. 'Zion is a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, as a royal diadem in the hand of her God;' Isa. lxii. 3. The precious stones of a diadem must be cut and polished, before they be set in beauty and glory. God will have oftentimes the precious living stones of Zion to have many a sharp cutting, before they come to be fully fixed in his diadem; but yet in the close, whatever obstacles stand in the way, the promise hath still wrought out its passage: as a river, all the while it is stopped with a dam, is still working higher and higher, still getting more and more strength, until it bear down all before it, and obtain a free course to its appointed place. Every time opposition lies against the fulfilling of the promise, and so seems to impede it for a season, it gets more and more power, until the appointed hour be come, and then the promise bears down all before it.

Were there any thing imaginable, whereof we had not experience, that it had been conquered to open a door for the fulfilling of every word of God, we might possibly, as to the apprehension of that thing, stagger from some other principle, than that of unbelief.

What is there in heaven or earth, but God and his ministering spirits, that hath not, one time or other, stood up to its utmost opposition, for the frustrating of the word, wherein some or other of the saints of God have put their trust? Devils in their temptations, baits, subtilties, accusations, and oppositions; men in their counsels, reasonings, contrivances, interests, dominions, combinations, armies, multitudes, and the utmost of their endeavours; the whole frame of nature, in its primitive instituted course, fire, water,

day, night, age, sickness, death, all in their courses have fought against the accomplishment of the promises. And what have they obtained by all their contendings? All disappointed, frustrated, turned back, changed, and served only to make the mercy of the promise more amiable and glorious.

I would willingly illustrate this demonstration with an instance, that the almighty, all-conquering power that is in the promise, settling all staggering upon its own basis of unbelief might be the more evident.

I might here mention Abraham, with all the difficulties and appearing impossibilities which the promise unto him did pass through, and cast to the ground the mercy of it at length, arising out of the grave; for he 'received his son from the dead in a figure;' Heb. xi. 19. Or I might speak of Joseph, Moses, or David; but I shall rather choose a president from among the works of God, in the days wherein we live, and that in a business, concerning which we may set up our Eben-ezer, and say, Thus far hath God been a helper.

Look upon the affair of Ireland. The engagement of the great God of revenges against murder and treachery, the interest of the Lord Christ and his kingdom against the man of sin, furnished the undertakers with manifold promises to carry them out to a desired, a blessed issue. Take now a brief view of some mountains of opposition, that lie in the way against any success in that place; and hear the Lord saying to every one of them, 'Who art thou, O great mountain! before my people thou shalt be made a plain;' Zech. iv. 7.

Not to mention the strivings and strugglings of two manner of people in the womb of this nation, totally obstructing for a long time the bringing forth of any deliverance for Ireland: nor yet that mighty mountain (which some misnamed a level), that thought at once to have locked an everlasting door upon that expedition: I shall propose some few, of many that have attended it.

(1.) The silence that hath been in heaven for half an hour, as to this business; the great cessation of prayers in the heavens, of many churches, hath been no small mountain in the way of the promise. When God will do good for

Zion, he requires that his ‘remembrancers give him no rest, until he do it;’ Isa. lxii. 7. And yet sometimes in the close of their supplications gives them an answer, ‘by terrible things;’ Psal. lxxv. 5. He is sometimes ‘silent to the prayers of his people;’ Psal. xxviii. 1. Is not then a grant rare, when his people are silent as to prayers? Of how many congregations in this nation may the prayers, tears and supplications for carrying on of the work of God in Ireland be written with the lines of emptiness? What a silence hath been in the heaven of many churches, for this last half hour? How many that began with the Lord in that work, did never sacrifice at the altar of Jehovah Nissi: nor considered that the Lord hath sworn to have war with such Amalekites as are there, ‘from generation to generation?’ Exod. xvii. 15, 16. They have forgotten, that Ireland was the first of the nations that laid wait for the blood of God’s people desiring to enter into his rest; and therefore ‘their latter end shall be, to perish for ever;’ Numb. xxiv. 20. Many are as angry as Jonah, not that Babylon is spared, but that it is not spared. Hath not this been held out as a mountain? What will you now do, when such or such, these and those men, of this or that party, look upon you ‘as the grass upon the house-tops, which withereth afore it groweth up; wherewith the mower filleth not his hand, nor he that bindeth sheaves, his bosom:’ that will not so much as say, ‘The blessing of the Lord be upon you, we bless you in the name of the Lord?’ But now shall the faithlessness of men make the ‘faith of God of none effect?’ Shall the kingdom of Christ suffer because some of those that are his, what through carnal wisdom, what through spiritual folly, refuse to come forth ‘to his help against the mighty?’ No, doubtless! ‘The Lord sees it, and it displeases him; he sees that there is no man, and wonders that there is no intercessor:’ even marvels that there are no more supplications on this behalf. ‘Therefore his own arm brought salvation to him, and his own righteousness it sustained him. He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak. According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies; to the island he will repay recompence;’ Isa. lix. 15—18. Some men’s not

praying shall not hinder the promises accomplishing. They may sooner discover an idol in themselves, than disappoint the living God. This was a mountain.

(2.) Our own advices and councils have often stood in the way of the promises bringing forth. This is not a time, nor place for narrations; so I shall only say to this in general, That if the choicest and most rational advices of the army had not been overswayed by the providence of God, in all probability your affairs had been more than ten degrees backward, to the condition wherein they are.

(3.) The visible opposition of the combined enemy in that nation seemed, as to our strength, unconquerable. The wise man tells us, A threefold cord is not easily broken. Ireland had a fivefold cord to make strong bands for Zion, twisted together. Never I think did such different interests bear with one another, for the compassing of one common end.

He that met the lion, the fox, and the ass, travelling together, wondered, '*quo unâ iter facerent*,' whither these ill-matched associates did bend their course: neither did his marvelling cease, when he heard they were going a pilgrimage, in a business of devotion.

He that should meet Protestants, covenanted Protestants, that had sworn in the presence of the great God to extirpate popery and prelacy, as the Scots in Ulster; others that counted themselves under no less sacred bond for the maintenance of prelates, service-books, and the like, as the whole party of Ormond's adherents; joined with a mighty number, that had for eight years together sealed their vows to the Romish religion, with our blood and their own; adding to them those that were profound to revolt up and down, as suited their own interest, as some in Munster; all closing with that party, which themselves had laboured to render most odious and execrable, as most defiled with innocent blood: he, I say, that should see all these after seven years mutual conflicting, and embruuing their hands in each other's blood, to march all one way together, cannot but marvel, '*quo unâ iter facerent*,' whither they should journey so friendly together. Neither surely, would his admiration be lessened, when he should hear, that the first thing they intended and agreed upon was, to cover the innocent blood of

forty-one contrary to that promise: 'Behold the Lord cometh out of his place, to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain;' Isa. xxvi. 21. and nextly, to establish catholic religion, or the kingdom of Babel, in the whole nation, in opposition to the engaged truth, and in our days visibly manifested power of the Lord Jesus; with sundry such-like things, contrary to their science and conscience, their covenant and light, yea, the trust and honesty of most of the chief leaders of them. Now how can the promise stand in the way of this Hydra? What says it to this combined opposition?

[1.] Why first, saith the Lord, 'Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished;' Prov. xi. 21. Their covering shall be too short, and narrow, to hide the blood which God will have disclosed.

[2.] And nextly, though they will give their power to the beast, and fight against the Lamb, consenting in this, who agree in nothing else in the world; yet they shall be broken in pieces, though they associate themselves they shall be broken in pieces. If Rezin and the son of Remaliah, Syria and Ephraim, old adversaries, combine together for a new enmity against Judah; if covenant and prelacy, popery and treachery, blood and (as to that) innocency, join hand in hand, to stand in the way of the promise; yet I will not in this join with them, says the Lord. Though they were preserved all distinctly in their several interests for seven years, in their mutual conflicts, that they might be scourges to one another; yet if they close to keep off the engagement of God in the word of his promise, not much more than the fourth part of one year shall consume some of them to nothing, and fill the residue with indignation and anguish.

By what means God hath mightily and effectually wrought, by mixing folly with their counsels, putting fear, terror, and amazedness upon all their undertakings, to carry on his own purpose, I could easily give considerable instances. That which hath been spoken in general, may suffice to bottom us on this, that whilst we are in the way of God, all staggering at the issue is from unbelief; for he can, he will do more such things as these.

*Use 1.* My first use shall be as unto temporals; for they also, as I told you, come under the promise, not to be staggered at, with the limitations before mentioned. Learn hence then to live more by faith in all your actings: believe and you shall be established; I have in the days of my pilgrimage seen this evil under the sun: many professors of the gospel called out to public actings have made it their great design to manage all their affairs with wisdom and policy, like the men of the residue of the nations. Living by faith upon the promises hath appeared to them as too low a thing, for the condition and employment wherein they now are; now they must plot, and contrive, and design, lay down principles of carnal fleshly wisdom to be pursued to the uttermost. And what I pray hath been the issue of such undertakings?

(1.) First, The power of religion hath totally been devoured by that lean, hungry, never-to-be-satisfied beast of carnal policy: no signs left that it was ever in their bosoms. Conformity unto Christ in gospel graces is looked on as a mean, contemptible thing. Some of them have fallen to downright atheism, most of them to wretched formality in the things of God. And then,

(2.) Secondly, Their plots and undertakings have generally proved tympanous and birthless; vexation and disappointment hath been the portion of the residue of their days. The ceasing to lean upon the Lord, and striving to be wise in our actings, like the men of the world, hath made more Rehoboams, than any one thing in this generation.

What now lies at the bottom of all this? Merely staggering at the promise, through unbelief. What building is that like to be, which hath a staggering foundation? When God answers not Saul, he goes to the devil. When the promise will not support us, we go to carnal policy: neither can it otherwise be. Engaged men finding one way to disappoint them, presently betake themselves to another. If men begin once to stagger at the promise, and to conclude, in their fears, that it will not receive accomplishment, that the fountain will be dry, they cannot but think it high time to dig cisterns for themselves. When David says, he shall one day perish by the hand of Saul, whatever God had said to the contrary, his next advice is, Let me go to the Philis-



tines: and what success he had in that undertaking, you know. Political diversions, from pure dependance on the promise, do always draw after them a long time of entanglements.

Give me leave to give a word of caution against one or two things, which men staggering at the promises through unbelief do usually in their carnal wisdom run into, for the compassing of the thing aimed at, that they may not be found in your honourable assembly.

[1.] Take heed of a various management of religion, of the things of God, to the advantage of the present posture and condition of your affairs. The things of Christ should be as Joseph's sheaf, to which all others should bow. When they are made to cringe, and bend, and put on a flattering countenance, to allure any sort of men into their interest, they are no more the things of Christ. I would it had not been too evident formerly, that men entangled in their affairs, enjoying authority, have with all industry and diligence pursued such and such an appearance of religion; not that themselves were so passionately affected with it, but merely for the satisfaction of some in that, whose assistance and compliance they needed for other things. Oh let not the things of God be immixed any more with carnal reasonings. His truths are all eternal and unchangeable. Give them at once the sovereignty of your souls, and have not the least thought of making them bend to serve your own ends, though good and righteous. Think not to get the promise like Jacob, by representing yourselves in the things of God for other than you are.

[2.] Hide no truth of God, as to that way of manifestation which to you is committed, for fear it should prove prejudicial to your affairs. That influence and signature of your power which is due to any truth of God, let it not be withheld by carnal reasonings. I might farther draw out these, and such-like things as these; the warning is, to live upon the faith of that promise, which shall surely be established, without turning aside to needless, crooked paths of your own.

*Use 2.* Secondly, Be faithful in doing all the work of God, whereunto you are engaged, as he is faithful in working all your works, whereunto he is engaged. Your work

whereunto (whilst you are in his ways) God is engaged, is your safety and protection: God's work whereunto you are engaged, is the propagating of the kingdom of Christ, and the setting up of the standard of the gospel. So far as you find God going on with your work, go you on with his. How is it that Jesus Christ is in Ireland only as a lion staining all his garments with the blood of his enemies; and none to hold him out as a lamb sprinkled with his own blood to his friends? Is it the sovereignty and interest of England that is alone to be there transacted? For my part I see no farther into the mystery of these things, but that I could heartily rejoice, that innocent blood being expiated, the Irish might enjoy Ireland so long as the moon endureth, so that Jesus Christ might possess the Irish. But God having suffered those sworn vassals of the man of sin to break out into such ways of villany, as render them obnoxious unto vengeance, upon such rules of government amongst men as he hath appointed; is there therefore nothing to be done, but to give a cup of blood into their hands? Doubtless the way whereby God will bring the followers after the beast to condign destruction, for all their enmity to the Lord Jesus, will be, by suffering them to run into such practices against men, as shall righteously expose them to vengeance, according to acknowledged principles among the sons of men. But is this all? Hath he no farther aim? Is not all this to make way for the Lord Jesus to take possession of his long since promised inheritance? And shall we stop at the first part? Is this to deal fairly with the Lord Jesus? Call him out to the battle, and then keep away his crown? God hath been faithful in doing great things for you, be faithful in this one, do your utmost for the preaching of the gospel in Ireland.

Give me leave to add a few motives to this duty.

(1.) They want it. No want like theirs who want the gospel. I would there were for the present one gospel preacher for every walled town in the English possession in Ireland. The land mourneth, and the people perish for want of knowledge: many run to and fro, but it is upon other designs; knowledge is not increased.

(2.) They are sensible of their wants, and cry out for supply. The tears and cries of the inhabitants of Dublin,

after the manifestations of Christ, are ever in my view. If they were in the dark, and loved to have it so, it might something close a door upon the bowels of our compassion; but they cry out of their darkness, and are ready to follow every one whosoever, to have a candle. If their being gospelless move not our hearts, it is hoped their importunate cries will disquiet our rest, and wrest help, as a beggar doth an alms.

(3.) Seducers and blasphemers will not be wanting to sow their tares, which those fallowed fields will receive, if there be none to cast in the seed of the word. Some are come over thither already without call, without employments, to no other end, but only to vaunt themselves to be God; as they have done in the open streets with detestable pride, atheism, and folly. So that as Ireland was heretofore termed by some in civil things a frippery of bankrupts, for the great number of persons of broken estates that went thither; so doubtless in religion it will prove a frippery of monstrous, enormous, contradictory opinions, if the work of preaching the word of truth and soberness be not carried on. And if this be the issue of your present undertakings, will it be acceptable, think you, to the Lord Jesus, that you have used his power and might to make way for such things as his soul abhors?

[1.] Will it be for his honour, that the people whom he hath sought to himself with so high a hand, should, at the very entrance of his taking possession, be leavened with those high and heavenly notions, which have an open and experimented tendency to earthly, fleshly, dunghill practices? Or,

[2.] Will it be for the credit and honour of your profession of the gospel, that such a breach should be under your hand? that it should be as it were, by your means? Will it not be a sword, and an arrow, and a maul in the hands of your observers? Who can bear the just scandal that would accrue? scandal to the magistrates, scandal to the ministers of this generation, in neglecting such an opportunity of advancing the gospel; sleeping all the day whilst others sow tares.

[3.] Where will be the hoped, the expected consolation of this great affair, when the testimony and pledge of the

peculiar presence of Christ amongst us upon such an issue shall be wanting?

What then shall we do? This thing is often spoken of, seldom driven to any close!

1st. Pray. 'Pray the Lord of the harvest, that he would send out,' that he would thrust forth 'labourers into his harvest.' The labourers are ready to say, There is a lion in the way, difficulties to be contended withal. And to some men it is hard seeing a call of God through difficulties: when if it would but clothe itself with a few carnal advantages, how apparent is it to them? they can see it through a little cranny. Be earnest then with the Master of these labourers, in whose hand is their life and breath, and all their ways, that he would powerfully constrain them, to be willing to enter into the fields, that are white for the harvest.

2dly. Make such provision, That those who will go may be fenced from outward straits and fears, so far as the uncertainty of human affairs in general, and the present tumultuating perturbations will admit. And let not, I beseech you, this be the business of an unpursued order. But,

3dly. Let some be appointed (generals die and sink by themselves) to consider this thing, and to hear what sober proposals may be made by any, whose hearts God shall stir up to so good a work.

This, I say, is a work wherein God expecteth faithfulness from you: stagger not at his promises, nor your own duty. However, by all means possible, in this business I have strived to deliver my own soul.

Once more, to this of faith, let me stir you up to another work of love, and that in the behalf of many poor perishing creatures, that want all things needful for the sustentation of life. Poor parentless children that lie begging, starving, rotting in the streets, and find no relief; yea, persons of quality, that have lost their dearest relations in your service, seeking for bread, and finding none. Oh, that some thoughts of this also might be seriously committed to them that shall take care for the gospel.

Use 3. I desire now to make more particular application of the doctrine, as to things purely spiritual. Until you know how to believe for your own souls, you will scarcely know how to believe for a nation. Let this then teach us

to lay the burden and trouble of our lives upon the right shoulder. In our staggerings, our doubtings, our disputes, we are apt to assign this and that reason of them; when the sole reason indeed is our unbelief. Were it not for such a cause, or such a cause, I could believe; that is, were there no need of faith. That is, faith must remove the mountains that lie in the way, and then all will be plain. It is not the greatness of sin, nor continuance in sin, nor backsliding into sin, that is the true cause of thy staggering, whatever thou pretendest (the removal of all these is from that promise, whose stability and certainty I before laid forth), but solely from thy unbelief, that 'root of bitterness, which springs up and troubles thee.' It is not the distance of the earth from the sun, nor the sun's withdrawing itself, that makes a dark and gloomy day; but the interposition of clouds, and vapourous exhalations. Neither is thy soul beyond the reach of the promise, nor doth God withdraw himself; but the vapours of thy carnal, unbelieving heart do cloud thee. It is said of one place, 'Christ could do no great work there.' Why so? for want of power in him? Not at all: but merely for want of faith in them, it was 'because of their unbelief.' The promise can do no great work upon thy heart to humble thee, to pardon, to quiet thee. Is it for want of fulness and truth therein? Not at all: but merely for want of faith in thee, that keeps it off. Men complain, that were it not for such things, and such things, they could believe; when it is their unbelief that casts those rubs in the way. As if a man should cast nails and sharp stones in his own way, and say, Verily I could run, were it not for those nails and stones; when he continues himself to cast them there. You could believe, were it not for these doubts and difficulties, these staggering perplexities; when, alas! they are all from your unbelief.

*Use 4.* See the sinfulness of all those staggering doubts and perplexities wherewith many poor souls have almost all their thoughts taken up. Such as is the root, such is the fruit. If the 'tree be evil, so will the fruit be also. Men do not gather grapes from brambles.' What is the root that bears this fruit of staggering? Is it not the evil root of unbelief? And can any good come from thence? Are not all the streams of the same nature with the fountain? If that

be bitter, can they be sweet? If the body be full of poison, will not the branches have their venom also? Surely if the mother (unbelief) be the mouth of hell, the daughters (staggerings) are not the gates of heaven.

Of the sin of unbelief I shall not now speak at large. It is in sum, the universal opposition of the soul unto God. All other sins arise against something or other of his revealed will, only unbelief sets up itself in a direct contradiction to all of him that is known. Hence the weight of condemnation in the gospel is constantly laid on this sin. 'He that believeth not, on him the wrath of God abideth: he shall be damned.' Now as every drop of sea water retains the brackishness and saltiness of the whole; so every staggering doubt, that is an issue of this unbelief, hath in it the unsavouriness and distastefulness unto God, that is in the whole.

Farther, to give you a little light into what acceptance our staggering thoughts find with the Lord, according to which must be our esteem of all that is in us; observe that,

- (1.) They grieve him.
- (2.) They provoke him.
- (3.) They dishonour him.

(1.) Such a frame grieves the Lord. Nothing more presses true love, than to have an appearance of suspicion. Christ comes to Peter, and asks him, 'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?' John xxi. 15. Peter seems glad of an opportunity to confess him, and his love to him, whom not long since he had denied, and answers readily, 'Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee.' But when Christ comes with the same question again and again, the Holy Ghost tells us, 'Peter was grieved, because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me?' It exceedingly troubled Peter that his love should come under so many questionings, which he knew to be sincere. The love of Christ to his is infinitely beyond the love of his to him. All our doubtings are nothing but so many questionings of his love. We cry, 'Lord Jesus, lovest thou us?' and again, 'Lord Jesus, lovest thou us?' and that with distrustful hearts and thoughts, that it is not, it cannot be. Speaking of the unbelieving Jews, the Holy Ghost tells us, 'Jesus was grieved for the hardness of their hearts;' Mark iii. 5. And as it is bitter to him in the root, so also in the fruit. Our staggerings and debates,

when we have a word of promise, is a grief to his Holy Spirit, as the unkindest return we can make unto his love.

(2.) It provokes him. How can this be, says Zechariah, that I should have a son? This shall be, saith the Lord, and thou thyself for thy questioning shalt be a sign of it, 'Thou shalt be dumb, and not speak;' Luke i. His doubting was a provocation. And our Saviour expresses no less, in that bitter reproof to his disciples upon their wavering, Matt. xvii. 17. 'O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you?' That is, in this unbelieving frame. Poor souls are apt to admire the patience of God in other matters, that he spared them in such and such sins, at such and such times of danger; but his exceeding patience towards them in their carnal reasonings, and fleshly objections against believing, this they admire not. Nay, generally they think it should be so, God would not have them one step farther; nay, they could be more steadfast in believing, as they suppose, might it stand with the good will of God; when all this while this frame of all others is the greatest provocation to the Lord, he never exercises more forbearance than about this kind of unbelief. When the spies had gone into Canaan, had seen the land, and brought of the good fruit of it, then to repine, then to question whether God would bring them into it or no, this caused the Lord 'to swear in his wrath, that they should not enter into his rest.' When God hath brought men to the borders of heaven, discovered to them the riches and excellency of his grace, admitted them to enter as spies into the kingdom of glory, then to fall a staggering, whether he intends them an entrance or no, is that which lies heavy on him. The like may be said of all promised mercies and deliverances whatsoever. That this is a provocation, the Lord hath abundantly testified, inasmuch as for it he hath oftentimes snatched sweet morsels from the mouths of men, and turned aside the stream of mercies, when it was ready to flow in upon them. 'If,' saith he, 'you will not believe, you shall not be established;' Isa. vii. 9. The very mercy but now promised concerning your deliverance shall be withheld. Oh, stop not success from Ireland by unbelief.

(3.) It dishonours God. In the close of this verse it is said, Abraham 'was strong in faith' (or staggered not)

‘giving glory to God.’ To be established in believing, is to give God the greatest glory possible. Every staggering thought that ariseth from this root of unbelief, robs God of his glory.

[1.] It robs him of the glory of his truth. ‘He that believeth not, hath made him a liar, because he believeth not his record ;’ 1 John v. 10. Let men pretend what they please (as most an end we give in specious pretences for our unbelief), the bottom of all is, the questioning of the truth of God in our false hearts.

[2.] It robs him of the glory of his fidelity or faithfulness in the discharge of his promises. ‘If we confess our sins, he is faithful to forgive us our sins ;’ 1 John i. 9. He hath engaged his faithfulness in this business of the forgiveness of iniquities, he whose right it is ; calling that in question, calls the faithfulness of God in question.

[3.] It robs him of the glory of his grace. In a word, if a man should choose to set himself in a universal opposition unto God, he can think of no more compendious way than this. This then is the fruit, this the advantage of all our staggering ; we rob God of glory, and our own souls of mercy.

*Use 5.* Be ashamed of, and humbled for, all your staggerings at the promises of God, with all your fleshly reasonings, and carnal contrivances issuing therefrom. For the most part we live upon successes, not promises : unless we see and feel the print of victories, we will not believe ; the engagement of God is almost quite forgotten in our affairs. We travel on without Christ, like his mother, and suppose him only to be in the crowd ; but we must return to seek him where we left him, or our journeying on will be to no purpose. When Job, after all his complaining, had seen the end of the Lord, he cries out, ‘Now I abhor myself in dust and ashes.’ You have seen the end of the Lord in many of his promises ; oh, that it might prevail to make you abhor yourselves in dust and ashes, for all your carnal fears, and corrupt reasonings upon your staggerings ! When David enjoyed his promised mercy, he especially shames himself for every thought of unbelief that he had whilst he waited for it : ‘I said,’ saith he, ‘in my haste, that all men were liars :’ and now he is humbled for it. Is this to be thankful, to forget our provoking thoughts of unbelief, when the mercy



is enjoyed ? The Lord set it home upon your spirits, and give it to receive its due manifestation.

(1.) If there be any counsels, designs, contrivances on foot amongst us, that are bottomed on our staggering at the promise under which we are, oh, let them be instantly cast down to the ground. Let not any be so foolish, as to suppose that unbelief will be a foundation for quiet habitations. You are careful to avoid all ways that might dishonour you, as the rulers of so great a nation ; oh, be much more careful about such things as will dishonour you as believers ; that is your greatest title ; that is your chiefest privilege. Search your own thoughts, and if any contrivance, any compliance be found springing up, whose seed was sown by staggering at the promise, root them up, and cast them out before it be too late.

(2.) Engage your hearts against all such ways for the future. Say unto God, How faithful art thou in all thy ways ! how able to perform all thy promises ! how hast thou established thy word in heaven and earth ! Who would not put their trust in thee ? We desire to be ashamed, that ever we should admit in our hearts the least staggering at the stability of thy word.

(3.) Act as men bottomed upon unshaken things, that are not at all moved by the greatest appearing oppositions. ‘He that believeth, will not make haste :’ be not hasty in your resolves in any distress ; wait for the accomplishment of the vision, for it will come. So long as you are in the way of God, and do the work of God, let not so much as your desires be too hasty after appearing strengthenings and assistance. Whence is it, that there is amongst us such bleating after the compliance of this or that party of the sons of men, perhaps priding themselves in our actings upon unbelief ; as though we proclaimed, that without such and such we cannot be protected in the things of God ? Let us, I beseech you, live above those things, that are unworthy of the great name that is called upon us.

Oh, that by these, and the like ways, we might manifest our self-condemnation, and abhorrency, for all that distrust and staggering at the word of God, which arising from unbelief, hath had such deplorable issues upon all our counsels and undertakings !