

THE SAINT'S HIDING-PLACE IN THE EVIL DAY.*

SERMON IV.

Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to him in well-doing, as to a faithful Creator.—1 PET. IV. 19.

THOUGH divinity be clear in other differences from carnal or natural reasons, yet it hath homogeneal reasons and grounds of its own, whence come inferences as natural as for the tree to bear fruit, or the sun to shine; so upon the former divine grounds (for it is a matter of suffering wherein we must have pure divinity to support our souls), the apostle comes to bring a spiritual inference suitable to the same in the words read unto you. *Wherefore*, concluding all to be true that was said before, *let them that suffer, &c.* Wherein consider, 1. That the state and condition of God's children is to suffer. 2. The dispensation of that suffering, they suffer not at all adventures, but according to the will of God. 3. Their duty in this estate, namely, to commit the keeping of their souls to God.

In the duty we have these particulars comprehended:—1. An action, to commit. 2. An object, what we must commit, the soul. 3. The person to whom, to God. 4. The manner, in well-doing. Lastly. The reason which should move us hereunto, implied in these words, *as unto a faithful Creator*. Whatsoever may support the doubting of a godly man in any trouble, and enforce upon him this duty of committing his soul to God, is briefly comprised in this, that God stands in that near relation of a Creator, yea, of a faithful Creator, to us. This is the scope of the words.

Obs. 1. That the state of God's children is to suffer, yea, to suffer of God; for sometimes he seems to be an enemy to his dearest servants, as unto Job. But chiefly they are in a militant estate and condition here.

1. *Why God's children must suffer here.* Because they live among those that they cannot but suffer from, wheresoever they live. Suppose they live among Christians, yet there are many Christians in name that are not so in deed. There hath been secret underminers in all ages; and what else may they look for but suffering from these? All that ever truly feared God and

* This title of the present sermon, which is taken from the reprint in the 'Saint's Cordials,' is preferred, to that placed over it in the original volume, viz., 'The Saints Safety in Evil Times,' inasmuch as at page 297, *seq.*, other two bear this heading.—G.

made conscience of their ways have found afflictions among false brethren. It was never heard of that a sheep should pursue a wolf.

2. They must suffer also in regard of themselves; for the truth is, the best of us all have many lusts to be subdued, and a great deal of corruption to be purged out, before we can come to heaven, that pure and holy place into which no unclean thing can enter, Rev. xxi. 27. Though a garden be never so fruitful, yet after a shower it will need weeding. So, after long peace, the church of God gathers soil, and needs cleansing.

Obj. But some carnal wretch will say, I thank God I never suffered in my life, but have enjoyed peace and prosperity, and my heart's content in everything.

Ans. In the best estate there will be suffering one way or other. Then, suspect thyself to be in a bad estate, for every true Christian suffers in one kind or other, either from without or within. Sometimes God's children are troubled more with corruption than with affliction; at other times their peace is troubled both with corruption within and with affliction without; at the best, they have sufferings of sympathy. Shall the members of Christ suffer in other countries, and we profess ourselves to be living members, and yet not sympathise with them? We must be conformable to our Head before we can come to heaven. But the dispensation of our suffering is according to the will of God, where note two things.

1. *That it is God's will we should suffer.*

2. *When we suffer we suffer according to his will.*

To pass briefly over these, as not being the thing I aim at,

God's will concerning our suffering is permissive in respect of those that do us harm; but in regard of our patient enduring injuries, it is his approving and commanding will. We are enjoined to suffer, and they are permitted to wrong us.

Obj. It seems, then, there is some excuse for those that persecute the saints. They do but *according to God's will*; and if it be so, who dares speak against them?

Ans. It is not God's commanding will, but his suffering will. He useth their malice for his own ends. God lets the rein loose upon their necks. As a man is said to set a dog upon another when he unlooseth his chain, so God is said to command them when he lets them loose to do mischief. They are full of malice themselves, which God useth as physicians do their poison to cure poison. God and they go two contrary ways, as a man in a ship walks one way, but is carried another. In the death of Christ the will of Judas and the rest went one way, and God's will another. So, in all our sufferings, when God useth wicked men, their will is destructive and hostile, but God's will is clean otherwise, aiming at the good of his people in all this. Nebuchadnezzar did the will of God in *carrying the people captive*. However, he thought not so, Isa. x. 7. Every sinful wretch that offers violence to the poor saints, imagine they do God good service in it, whenas, indeed, they do but execute the malice and venom of their own hearts. In the highest heavens, as they say in philosophy, the first thing moved is by a violent motion. The sun is carried about the heavens violently against its own proper motion, which inclines to a clean contrary course. So God dealeth with wicked men; he carries them they know not whither. They are set to do mischief, and God useth their sinful dispositions for his own ends, which plainly shews that God is without all fault, and they without all excuse.

Obs. But observe further, *that we never suffer but when God will.* And,

beloved, his will is not that we should always suffer, though generally our estate be so in one kind or other. God is *not always chiding*, Ps. ciii. 9, but hath times of breathing and intermission, which he vouchsafes his children for their good. He knows if we had not some respite, some refreshment, we should soon be consumed and brought to nothing. 'The Lord knows whereof we are made, and considers we are but dust,' Ps. ciii. 14. Therefore he saith, 'Though for a season you are in heaviness, yet rejoice,' &c., 1 Pet. i. 6.

And this the Lord doth out of mercy to his poor creatures, that they might not sink before him, but gather strength of grace, and be the better fitted to bear further crosses afterwards. You know, Acts ix. 31, after Saul's conversion, when he was become a Paul, then the church had rest, and increased in the comforts of the Holy Ghost. God gives his people pausing times, some *lucida intervalla* (a). Our time of going into trouble is in God's hands; our time of abiding trouble is in God's hands; our time of coming out is in God's hands. As in our callings he preserves our going out and our coming in, so in every trouble that befalls us we come in and tarry there, and go out of the same when he pleaseth. He brings us to the fire as the goldsmith puts his metals and holds them there, till he hath refined them and purged out the dross, and then brings them out again. 'Our times,' as David saith excellently, 'are in thy hands, O Lord,' Ps. xxxi. 15. Beloved, if our times were in our enemies' hands we should never come out. If they were in our own hands we should never stay in trouble, but come out as soon as we come in; nay, we would not come into trouble at all if we could choose. Beloved, everything of a Christian is dear unto God; his health is precious, his blood is precious; especially precious to the Lord is the death of his saints, Ps. cxvi. 15. Do you think, therefore, he will let them suffer without his will? No; he will have a valuable consideration of all those that are malignant persecutors of his people at last. And it is for matters better than life that God lets his children suffer here; for, alas! this life is but a shadow, as it were, nothing. God regards us not as we are in this present world, but as strangers; therefore, he suffers us to sacrifice this life upon better terms than life, or else he would never let us suffer for his truth, and seal it with our dearest blood, as many of the saints have done.

Use. I beseech you, therefore, considering all our sufferings are by the appointment and will of God, let us bring our souls to an holy resignation unto his Majesty, not looking so much to the grievance we are under as to the hand that sent it. We should with one eye consider the thing, with another eye the will of God in the same. When a man considers, I suffer now, but it is by the will of God; he puts me upon it, how cheerfully will such an one commit his soul to the Lord! It is as hard a matter to suffer God's will as to do his will. Passive obedience is as hard as active. In the active we labour that what we do may please God; in the passive we must endeavour that what he doth may please us. Our hearts are as untoward to the one as to the other. Therefore, let us beg of God to bring our wills to the obedience of his blessed will in everything. Would you have a pattern of this? Look upon our blessed Saviour, to whom we must be conformable in obedience if ever we will be conformable in glory. 'Lo, I come,' saith he; 'I am ready to do thy will, O Lord,' Heb. x. 9. What was the whole life of Christ but a doing and a suffering of God's will? 'Behold, it is written in the volume of thy book that I should do thy will,' ver. 7, and here I am ready pressed for it. It should be, therefore, the

disposition of all those that are led by the Spirit of Christ, as all must be that hope to reign with him, to be willing to suffer with Christ here, and say with him, Lord, I am here ready to do and suffer whatsoever thou requirest! When once we are brought to this, all the quarrel is ended between God and us.

I come now to that which I chiefly intend, which is the Christian's duty. *Let him commit his soul to God in well-doing.* Wherein observe,

1. The manner *how* he must commit, *in well-doing.*

2. What, *his soul.*

3. To whom, *to God.*

4. The reasons moving, implied in these words, *as unto a faithful Creator.*

Now this *well-doing* must be distinguished into two times.

1. *Before our suffering.* When a son of Belial shall offer violence to a poor saint of God, what a comfort is this, that he suffers in well-doing! Oh, beloved, we should so carry ourselves that none might speak evil justly against us, that none, unless it were wrongfully, might do us hurt. We should be in an estate of well-doing continually in our general and particular callings. We must not go out of our sphere, but serve God in our standings, that if trouble comes it may find us in a way of well-pleasing, either doing works of charity or else the works of our particular calling wherein God hath set us. In all that befalls thee look to this, that thou suffer not as an evil doer, 1 Pet. iv. 15.

2. So likewise *in suffering*, we must commit our souls to God in well-doing in a double regard.

1. *We must carry ourselves generally well in all our sufferings.*

2. In particular, *we must do well to them that do us wrong.*

First, I say, in affliction our carriage must be generally good in respect of God, by a meek behaviour under his hand, without murmuring against him.

2. In regard of the cause of God, that we betray it not through fear or cowardice, through base aims and intentions, &c., but endeavour to carry it with a good conscience in all things. When we make it clear by managing anything, that we are led with the cause and conscience of our duty, it works mightily upon them that wrong us. (1.) It wins those that are indifferent; and (2.) confounds the obstinate, and stops their mouths. Therefore, let us carry ourselves well, not only before, but in suffering. We may not fight against them with their own weapons, that is, be malicious as they are malicious, and rail as they rail. Beloved, this is as if a man should see another drink poison, and he will drink, too, for company; he is poisoned with malice, and thou, to revenge thyself, wilt be poisoned too. What a preposterous course is this! Ought we not rather to behave ourselves as befits the cause of Christ, as becomes our Christian profession, and as befits him whose children we are?

We should have an eye to God, and an eye to ourselves, and an eye to others, and an eye to the cause in hand; so we shall do well. We must not commit our souls to God in idleness, doing nothing at all, nor yet in evil doing, but in well doing. We must have a care, if we would suffer with comfort, not to study how to avoid suffering by tricks, so to hurt the cause of Christ. This is to avoid suffering, by sin, to leap out of one danger into another. Is not the least evil of sin worse than the greatest evil of punishment? What doth a man get by pleasing men, to displease God? Perhaps a little ease for the present. Alas! what is this to that inexpressible horror and despair which will one day seize upon thy soul eternally

for betraying the blessed cause and truth of Christ? How can we expect God should own us another day, when we will not own him in his cause, and his members, to stand for them now? Think on that speech of our Saviour, 'Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, or of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father,' Mark viii. 38.

Therefore, avoid not any suffering *by sin*. See how blessed St Paul carried himself in this case. 'The Lord,' saith he, 'hath delivered me, and will deliver me,' 2 Tim. iv. 18. From what? from death? No; *from every evil work*. What! will God keep him from evil sufferings? No; for immediately after he was put to death. What then? Why! he will preserve me from every evil work, that is, from every sinful act, which may hurt the cause of Christ, or blemish my profession. This was it Paul chiefly regarded; not whether he will preserve me from death or trouble, I leave that to him; but this I hope and trust to, that he will preserve me from every evil work to his heavenly kingdom. Thus should it be with every Christian in the cause of religion, or in a cause of justice, &c.; for there is not any good cause but it is worth our lives to stand in, if we be called to it. It is necessary we should be just; it is not so necessary we should live (*b*). A Christian's main care is how to do well; and if he can go on in that course, he is a happy man.

Obj. But I cannot do well, but I shall suffer ill.

Ans. Labour, therefore, to carry thyself well in suffering evil, not only in the general, but even in particular, towards those persons that do thee wrong; endeavour to requite their evil with good. There is a great measure of self-denial required to be a Christian, especially in matter of revenge, 'to pray for them that curse us, to do good to them that persecute us,' &c., and so 'heap coals of fire upon our enemies' heads,' Prov. xxv. 22, Rom. xii. 20. How is that? There are—

1. Coals of conversion.

2. Coals of confusion.

How in suffering we heap coals of fire. You know coals do either melt or consume. If they belong to God, we shall heap coals of fire to convert them, and make them better by our holy carriage in suffering. If they be wicked, graceless wretches, we shall heap coals of fire to consume them; for it will aggravate their just damnation when they do ill to those that deserve well of them.

Obj. Some will say, Christianity is a strange condition, that enforceth such things upon men, that are so contrary to nature.

Ans. It is so, indeed, for we must be new-moulded before ever we can come to heaven. We must put off our whole self; and he is gone a great way in religion, that hath brought his heart to this pass. None ever overcame himself in these matters out of religious respects, but he found a good issue at last. It is a sweet evidence of the state of grace, none better, when a man can love his very enemies, and those that have done him most wrong; it is an argument that such a man hath something above nature in him. What is above nature, if this be not, for a man to overcome himself in this sweet appetite of revenge? Revenge is most natural to a man; it is as sugar, as the heathen saith; and for a man to overcome himself in that, it argues the power of grace and godliness in such a one.

As Christianity is an excellent estate, an admirable advancing of a man to a higher condition, so it must not seem strange for those that are Christians to be raised to a higher pitch of soul than other men. See how our

Saviour dealt in this particular, 'Father, forgive them, they know not what they do,' Luke xxiii. 34; and so likewise Stephen, being led by the same Spirit of Christ, desired God 'not to lay this sin to their charge,' Acts vii. 60; and so all the martyrs in the first state of the church, when the blood of Christ was warm, and the remembrance of Christ was fresh, were wont to pray for their enemies, committing their souls to God in well doing.

The excellent victory of suffering. I beseech you let us labour by all means possible to bring our hearts hereunto. If anything overcome, this will do it, *to suffer well*. The church of God is a company of men that gain and overcome by suffering in doing good. Thus the dove overcomes the eagle, the sheep overcomes the wolf, the lamb overcomes the lion, &c. It hath been so from the beginning of the world. Meek Christians, by suffering quietly, have at length overcome those that are malicious, and have gained even their very enemies to the love of the truth. What shall we think, then, of the greatest part of the world, who never think of suffering, which is the first lesson in Christianity, but study their ease and contentment, accounting the blessed martyrs too prodigal of their blood, &c.?

Others there are, who, if once they come to suffer, presently fall to shifting and plotting, how to get forth again by unlawful means; oftentimes making shipwreck of a good conscience, and dishonouring the gospel of God. I beseech you consider these things. Every man would have Christ, and be religious, so long as they may enjoy peace and quietness; but if once trouble or persecution arises, then farewell religion; they cast off their profession then. I wish this were not the case of many seeming Christians in these our days.

But suppose a man carry himself *ill in suffering*?

There is not the least promise of comfort in Scripture to such a man, unless he *return*, and seek the Lord by timely repentance; for all encouragement is to *well-doing*. Oh, what a pitiful thing is it for the soul to be in such a state, as that it dares not commit itself to God! A man in evil doing cannot go home to his own conscience for comfort, nor have any inward peace in the least action he performs, so long as he doth it with false aims, and carnal affections, &c. Who would deprive himself of the comfort of suffering in a good cause for want of integrity? I beseech you, therefore, carry yourselves well in anything you either do or suffer, otherwise no blessing can be expected; for we tempt the Lord, and make him accessory to us, when we commit our souls to him in ill-doing: even as your pirates and other miscreants in the world, that will rob and steal, and do wickedly, and yet pray to God to bless them in their base courses (c); what is this but to make God like themselves, as if he approved their theft and horrible blasphemy?

But *what* must we commit to God in *well-doing*? The keeping of our *souls*. The soul is the more excellent part, witness he that purchased the same with his dearest blood. 'What will it profit a man,' saith our Saviour, 'to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?' Mark viii. 36. Who could know the price of a soul better than he that gave his life for redemption of it? Yea, if the whole world were laid in one balance and the soul in another, the soul were better than all. Therefore, whatsoever estate thou art in, let thy first care be for thy soul, that it may go well with that. You know in any danger or combustion, suppose the firing of an house, that which a man chiefly looks after is his jewels and precious things, 'I have some wealth in such a place, if I could but have that I care for no more, let the rest go;' so it is with a Christian, whatsoever becomes of him

in this world, he looks to his precious soul, that that may be laid up safely in the hands of God. Suppose a man were robbed by the highway, and had some special jewel about him, though every thing else were taken away from him, yet so long as that is left he thinks himself a happy man, and saith, they have taken away some luggage, but they have left me that which I prize more than all : so it is with a Christian, let him be stripped of all he hath, so his soul be not hurt, but all safe and well there, he cares not much.

Quest. But what should we desire our souls to be *kept from* in this world ?

Ans. From sin and the evil consequences thereof. Beloved, we have great need our souls should be kept by God ; for alas ! what sin is there but we shall fall into it, unless God preserve us in peace and comfort, and assurance of a better estate. What would become of our poor souls if we had them in our own keeping ? Ahithophel had the keeping of his own soul, and what became of him ? First, he did run into the sins of treason, and afterwards, being a wicked politician, and an atheist, having no delight in God, was the executioner of himself (*d*). We shall be ready, as Job saith, to tear our own souls if God hath not the keeping of them ; we shall tear them with desperate thoughts, as Judas, who never committed his soul to God, but kept it himself, and we see what became of him. The apostle bids us go to God in prayer, and committing our souls to him, to keep from sin, despair, distrust, and all spiritual evil whatsoever, ‘and then the peace of God which passeth all understanding,’ as the word in the original is, ‘shall guard* our souls in Christ,’ Phil. iv. 7. Our souls have need of guarding, and we of ourselves are not sufficient to do it ; therefore we should commit them unto God, for except he preserve us we shall soon perish.

Wicked men think that they have no souls. I am ashamed to speak of it, and yet notwithstanding the courses of men are such, that they enforce a man to speak that which he is ashamed of. What do I speak of committing your souls to God, when many thousands in the world live as if they had no souls at all ? I am persuaded that your common swearers, and profane wretches, who wrong their souls to pleasure their bodies, and prostitute both body and soul, and all to their base lusts, think for the time that they have no souls ; they think not that there is such an excellent immortal substance breathed into them by God, which must live for ever in eternal happiness or endless misery. Did they believe this they would not wound and stain their precious souls as they do ; they would not obey every base lust out of the abundance of profaneness in their hearts, even for nothing, as many notorious loose persons do. Oh could we but get this principle into people, that they have immortal souls, which must live for ever, they would soon be better than they are ; but the devil hath most men in such bondage that their lives speak that they believe they have no souls, by their ill usage of them.

Obj. But must we not commit our *bodies* and our *estates* to God, as well as our souls ?

Ans. Yes, all we have ; for that is only well kept which God keeps ; but yet in time of suffering we must be at a point† with these things. If God will have our liberty, if he will have our life and all, we must hate all for Christ’s sake ; but we must not be at such a point with our souls, we must keep them close to God, and desire him to keep them *in well-doing*.

Obj. Suppose it come to an exigent, that we must either sin and hurt our souls, or else lose all our outward good things ?

See note *k*, page 334.—G.

† That is, ‘make light of.’—En.

Ans. Our chief care must be over our souls. We must desire God to preserve our souls, whatsoever becomes of these; our principal care must be that that be not blemished in the least kind; for, alas! other things must be parted with first or last. This body of ours, or whatsoever is dear in the world, must be stripped from us, and laid in the dust ere long. But here is our comfort, though our body be dead, yet our souls are themselves still; dead St Paul is Paul still. Our body is but the case or tabernacle wherein our soul dwells; especially a man's self is his soul; keep that and keep all. I beseech you, therefore, as things are in worth and excellency in God's account, let our esteem be answerable. You have many compliments in the world, how doth your body, &c., mere compliments indeed, but how few will inquire how our souls do? alas! that is in poor case. The body perhaps is well looked unto, that is clothed, and care taken that nothing be wanting to it, but the poor soul is ragged and wounded, and naked. Oh that men were sensible of that miserable condition their poor souls are in.

Beloved, the soul is the better part of a man, and if that miscarries, all miscarries. If the soul be not well, the body will not continue long in a good estate. Bernard saith sweetly, 'Oh, body, thou hast a noble guest dwelling in thee, a soul of such inestimable worth that it makes thee truly noble.' Whatsoever goodness and excellency is in the body, is communicated from the soul; when that once departs, the body is an unlovely thing, without life or sense. The very sight of it cannot be endured of the dearest friends. What an incredible baseness is it therefore, that so precious a thing as the soul is, should serve these vile bodies of ours! Let the body stay its leisure; the time of the resurrection is the time of the body. In this life it should be serviceable to our souls in suffering and doing whatsoever God calls us unto. Let our bodies serve our souls now, and then body and soul shall for ever after be happy; whereas, if we, to gratify our bodies, do betray our souls, both are undone.

Beloved, the devil and devilish-minded men, acted with his spirit, have a special spite to the soul. Alas! what do they aim at in all their wrongs and injuries to God's children? Do they care to hurt the body? indeed, they will do this rather than nothing at all; they will rather play at small game than sit out. The devil will enter into the swine rather than stand out altogether. Some mischief he will do, however; but his main spite is at the soul, to vex and disquiet that, and taint it with sin all he can. Considering therefore that it is Satan's aim to unloose our hold from God, by defiling our souls with sin, so to put a divorce betwixt his blessed majesty and us, oh! let it be our chief care to see to that which Satan strikes at most! He did not so much care, in Job's trouble, for his goods, or for his house, or children, &c. Alas! he aimed at a further mischief than this! his plot was how to make him blaspheme and wound his soul, that so there might be a difference betwixt God and him. He first tempts us to commit sin, and afterwards to despair for sin.

Quest. But to whom must the soul be committed?

Ans. Our souls must be committed to God. Commit the keeping of your souls to God. Indeed, he only can keep our souls. We cannot keep them ourselves; neither can anything else in the world do it. Some when they are sick will commit themselves to the physician, and put all their trust in him. When they are in trouble they will commit themselves to some great friend; when they have any bad, naughty cause to manage, they will commit themselves to their purse, and think that shall bear them out in anything. One thinks his wit and policy shall secure him, another that his

shifts may shelter him, &c.; and indeed the heart of man is so full of atheism, that it can never light upon the right object, *to trust God alone*, until it sees everything else fail, as being insufficient to support the soul, or to yield any solid comfort in times of extremity and distress.

Quest. But why must we commit our souls to God?

Ans. Because he is a *faithful Creator*. Whence observe,

Obs. *That the soul of man being an understanding essence, will not be satisfied and settled without sound reasons.* Comfort is nothing else but reasons stronger than the evil which doth afflict us; when the reasons are more forcible to ease the mind than the grievance is to trouble it. It is no difficult matter to commit our souls to God when we are once persuaded that he is a *faithful Creator*. A man commits himself to another man, and hath no other reason for it, but only he is persuaded of his ability and credit in the world; that he is a man of estate and power to do him good. So it is in this business of religion. Our souls are carried to anything strongly when they are carried by strong reasons, as in this particular of trusting God with our souls. When we see sufficient reasons inducing thereto, we easily resign them into his hands. This shews that popery is an uncomfortable religion, which brings men to despair. They have no reason for what they maintain. What reason can they give for their doctrine of doubting, transubstantiation, perfect obedience to the law, &c.? These are unreasonable things. The soul cannot yield to such absurdities. It must have strong reasons to stablish it, as here, to consider God as a *faithful Creator*, &c. There is something in God to answer all the doubts and fears of the soul, and to satisfy it in any condition whatsoever. This is the very foundation of religion; not that any worth can accrue to the Creator from the creature, but that there is an all-sufficiency in the Creator to relieve the poor creature. If a man consider in what order God created him, it will make him trust God. Paradise and all in it were ready for him, so soon as he came into the world. God created us after his own image, that as he was Lord of all things, so we should be lord of the creatures. They were all at his service, that he might serve God. Therefore after everything else was created, he was made, that so God might bring him as it were to a table ready furnished.

And not only in nature, but in holiness, having an immortal and invisible soul resembling God. We must take God here as a Creator of our whole man, body and soul, and of *the new creature* in us. God made man at the first, but that was not so much as for God to be made man, to make us new creatures. God created our bodies out of the dust, but our souls come immediately from himself. He breathes them into us, and in this respect he is a higher Creator than in the other; for when we had marred our first making, and became more like beasts than men, for indeed every one that is not like God sympathiseth with beasts or devils one way or other, God in Christ made us new again. Yea, God became man to enrich us with all grace and goodness, to free us from the hands of Satan, and bring us to an eternal state of communion with himself in heaven. For all the old heaven and the old earth shall pass away, and the old condition of creatures, and a new life shall be given them. God that made the new heaven and the new earth, hath made us for them. Considering therefore that God gave us our first being, and when we were worse than naught, gave us a second being in regard to our new creation, how should it stir us up to commit our souls unto him! especially if we consider that in him we 'live and move and have our being,' Acts xvii. 28; that there is not

the least thought and affection to goodness in us but it comes from God ; we are what we are by his grace.

Quest. What is the reason that love descends so much ?

Ans. Because a man looks upon that which is his own and loves it. Now God looks upon us as upon those into whom he hath infused mercy and goodness, and he loves his own work upon us ; and therefore having begun a good work, will perfect the same. Do not men delight to polish their own work ? As in the first creation God never took off his hand till he had finished his work, so in the second creation of our souls he will never remove his hand from the blessed work of grace till he hath perfected the same ; therefore we may well commit our souls to him.

Obj. But suppose a man be in a desperate estate, and hath no way of escaping ?

Ans. Remember that God is the same still ; he hath not forgot his old art of creating, but is as able to help now as ever, and can create comforts for thee in thy greatest troubles. As in the first creation he made light out of darkness, order out of confusion, so still he is able out of thy confused and perplexed estate to create peace and comfort. Thou knowest not what to do perhaps, thy mind is so troubled and disquieted ; why, commit thy soul to God ; he can raise an excellent frame out of the chaos of thy thoughts. Therefore be not dismayed ; consider thou hast God in covenant with thee, and hast to deal with an almighty Creator, who can send present help in time of need. Dost thou want any grace ? dost thou want spiritual life ? Go to this Creator, he will put a new life into thee ; he that made all things of nothing can raise light out of thy dark mind, and can make fleshy thy stony heart, though it be as hard as a rock. Therefore never despair, but frequent the means of grace, and still think of God under this relation of a Creator ; and when he hath begun any good work of grace in thee, go confidently to His Majesty, and desire him to promote and increase the same in thy heart and life. Lord, I am thy poor creature, thou hast in mercy begun a blessed work in me, and where thou hast begun thou hast said thou wilt make an end. When thou createdst the world, thou didst not leave it till all was done ; and when thou createdst man thou madest an end. Now, I beseech thee, perfect the *new creature* in my soul. As thou hast begun to enlighten mine understanding and to direct my affections to the best things, so I commit my soul unto thee for further guidance and direction to full happiness.

NOTES.

(a) P. 403.—‘*Lucida Intervals.*’ This is the title of a very singular volume by Carkesse. 4to. 1679.

(b) P. 405.—‘It is necessary we should be just ; *it is not so necessary we should live.*’ The memorable reprimand of the man who, engaged in a disreputable business, and defending himself against the sarcasms of Dr Samuel Johnson, pleaded he ‘must live.’ ‘Not at all, Sir ; there is no necessity for *your* living,’ enforces the apophthegm of Sibbes. It is one of the gems preserved by Boswell.

(c) P. 406.—‘Miscreants . . . that will rob and steal and do wickedly, and yet pray to God to bless them in their base courses.’ The ‘Thugs’ and the appalling system of ‘Thuggism’ furnish apt examples of this. Consult Arnold’s ‘*Marquis Dalhousie’s Administration of the Punjaub*,’ just issued, for narrative of their suppression in India. It contains many startling illustrations of Sibbes’s words.

(d) P. 407.—‘*Ahithophel . . . a wicked politician.*’ ‘Ahithophel,’ or the ‘Wicked Politician,’ is the title of one of Nathaniel Carpenter’s curious tractates. 4to. 1629.

THE SAINT'S HIDING-PLACE IN THE EVIL DAY.*

SERMON V.

Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit their souls to him in well-doing, as to a faithful Creator.—1 PET. IV. 19.

I AM now to treat of that other attribute of God, which should move us to trust in him, namely, as he is a *faithful* Creator. Now God is faithful, 1. In his *nature*. He is I AM, always like himself, immutable and unchangeable. 2. In his *word*. He expresseth himself as he is. The word that comes from God is an expression of the faithfulness of his nature. 3. In his *works*. 'Thou art good, and dost good,' as the psalmist saith, Ps. cxix. 68. God being faithful in himself, all must needs be so that proceeds from him. Whatsoever relation God takes upon him, he is faithful therein. As he is a Creator, so he preserves and maintains his own work. As he is a Father, he is faithful in discharging that duty to the full, for his children's good. As he is our Friend, he likewise performs all the duties of that relation, &c. And why doth God stoop so low to take these relations upon him, but only to shew that he will certainly accomplish the same to the utmost? Whence is it that men are faithful in their relations one towards another, that the father is faithful to his child? Is it not from God, the chief Father? That a friend should be faithful to his friend, is it not from God, the great Friend?

All his ways are mercy and truth, Ps. xxxv. 10. They are not only merciful and good and gracious, but mercy and truth itself. If he shew himself to be a Father, he is a true father, a true friend, a true creator and protector. As one saith, 'Shall I cause others to fear, and be a tyrant myself?'† All other faithfulness is but a beam of that which is in God. Shall not he be most faithful that makes other things faithful?

Now, this faithfulness of God is here a ground of this duty of committing ourselves to him; and we may well trust him whose word hath been seven times tried in the fire, Ps. xii. 6. There is no dross in it. Every word of God is a sure word; his truth is a shield and buckler; we may well trust in it. Therefore, when you read of any singular promise in the New

* Title.—See Note p. 401.

† Qu.—'Be a tyrant to myself?'—G. Rather, 'Shall I cause others to fear tyrants, and be a tyrant myself?'—ED.

Testament, it is said, 'This is a faithful saying,' &c., 1 Tim. i. 15; that is, this is such a speech as we may trust to; it is the speech of a *faithful* Creator.

Considering, therefore, that God is so faithful every way in his promises and in his deeds, let us make especial use of it. Treasure up all the promises we can of the forgiveness of sins, of protection and preservation; that he will never leave us, but be *our God to death*, &c., and then consider withal that he is faithful in performing the same. When we are affrighted by his majesty and his justice, and other attributes, then think of his mercy and truth. He hath clothed himself with faithfulness, as the psalmist saith. In all the unfaithfulness of men whom thou trustest, depend upon this, that God is still the same, and will not deceive thee.

When we have man's word, we have his sufficiency in mind, for men's words are as themselves are. What will not the word of a king do? If a man be mighty and great, his word is answerable. This is the reason why we should make so much of the word of God, because it is the word of Jehovah, a mighty Creator, who gives a being to all things, and can only be Lord and Master of his word. We know God's meaning no otherwise than by his word. Till we come to the knowledge of vision in heaven, we must be content with the knowledge of revelation in the word.

And in every promise, single out that which best suiteth with thy present condition. If thou art in any great distress, think upon the almighty power of God. Lord, thou hast made me of nothing, and canst deliver me out of this estate. Behold, I fly unto thee for succour, &c. If thou art in perplexity for want of direction, and knowest not what to do, single out the attribute of God's wisdom, and desire him to teach thee the way that thou shouldst go. If thou art wronged, fly to his justice, and say, O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, hear and help thy servant. If thou be surprised with distrust and staggering, then go to his truth and faithfulness. Thou shalt always find in God something to support thy soul in the greatest extremity that can befall thee; for if there were not in God a fulness to supply every exigent* that we are in, he were not to be worshipped, he were not to be trusted.

Man is lighter than vanity in the balance. Every man is a liar, that is, he is false. We may be so, and yet be men too, but God is essentially true. He cannot deceive and be God too. Therefore ever, when thou art disappointed with men, retire to God and to his promises, and build upon this, that the Lord will not be wanting in anything may do thee good. With men there is breach of covenant, nation with nation, and man with man. There is little trust to be had in any; but in all confusions here is comfort. A religious person may cast himself boldly into the arms of the Almighty, and go to him in any distress, as to a faithful Creator that will not forsake him.

Use. Oh, let us be ashamed that we should dishonour him who is ready to pawn his faithfulness and truth for us. If we confess our sins, 'God is faithful to forgive them,' 1 John i. 9. He will not suffer us to be tempted 'above that which we are able,' 1 Cor. x. 13. When we perplex ourselves with doubts and fears whether he will make good his promise or not, we disable His Majesty. Do we not think God stands upon his truth and faithfulness? Undoubtedly he doth, and we cannot dishonour him more

* That is, exigency. Brooks uses 'exigents' in the title of one of his raciest books, viz., 'The Mute Christian under the Smarting Rod, with Sovereign Antidotes against the most miserable *Exigents*.' 12mo, 1669.—G.

than to distrust him, especially in his evangelical promises. We make him a liar, and rob him of that which he most glories in, his mercy and faithfulness, if we rest not securely upon him.

See the baseness of man's nature. God hath made all other things faithful that are so, and we can trust them; but are ever and anon questioning the truth of his promise. We may justly take up Salvian's complaint in his time, 'Who hath made the earth faithful to bring forth fruit,' saith he, 'but God? Yet we can trust the ground with sowing our seed. Who makes man faithful, who is by nature the most slippery and unconstant creature of all other, but God only? Yet we can trust a vain man, whose breath is in his nostrils, and look for great matters at his hands, before an all-sufficient God, that changeth not. Who makes the seas and the winds faithful, that they do not hurt us, but God? And yet we are apt to trust the wind and weather sooner than God, as we see many seamen that will thrust forth their goods into the wide ocean in a small bark, to shift any way, rather than trust God with them.'

Yea, let Satan, by his wicked instruments, draw a man to some cursed politic reasons, for the devil doth not immediately converse with the world, but in his instruments, and he will sooner trust him than God himself. So prone are our hearts to distrust the Almighty, to call his truth in question, and to trust the lies of our own hearts and other men's, before him. Let us, therefore, lament our infidelity, that having such an omnipotent and faithful creator to rely upon, yet we cannot bring our hearts to trust in him. There are two main pillars of a Christian's faith:—

1. The power of God.
2. The goodness of God.

These two, like Aaron and Hur, hold up the arms of our prayers. Let our estate be never so desperate, yet God is a Creator still. Let our sins and infirmities be never so great, yet he hath power to heal them. Oh, how should this cheer up our souls, and support our drooping spirits in all our strivings and conflicts with sin and Satan, that we yield not to the least temptation, having such an almighty God to fly unto for succour.

We must not trust the creature. 'Cursed is that man which makes flesh his arm,' Jer. xvii. 5. He that we trust in, must be no less than a Creator. 'Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils,' saith God, he is a poor creature as thyself is; raised of nothing, and shall come to dust again. If we would be trusting, as we needs must, for we are dependent persons, and want many things whilst we are here, let us go to the fountain, and not to broken cisterns for comfort.

It is no small privilege for a Christian to have this free access to God in times of extremity. Be we what we can be, take us at our worst in regard of sin or misery, yet we are his creatures still. I am the clay, thou art the potter; I am a sinful wretch, yet I am the workmanship of thy hands. O Lord, thou hast framed me and fashioned me, &c. No wicked person in the world can, upon good ground, plead in this manner, though they may say to God, *I am thy creature*, yet they have not the grace in their troubles to plead this unto him. Why, Lord, though I be a rebellious son, and am not worthy to be called thy servant, yet I am thy creature, though a sinful one. Surely, had we faith, we would take hold by a little. The soul of man is like the vine, it winds about and fastens upon every little help. Faith will see day at a little hole; and where it sees anything it will catch at it, as the woman of Canaan. Christ calls her dog. Why, be it so, Lord, *I am a dog*, yet I am one of the family though I be a dog; therefore *have mercy on me*.

Oh, it is a sweet reasoning thus to cling about God, and gather upon him; it is a special art of faith. Though a carnal man may reason thus, as having a ground from the truth of the thing, yet he hath not grace to reason out of an affection thereunto. Though he should say, Lord, I am thy creature; yet his heart tells him thus, if he would hearken to it, I am thy creature, Lord, but I have made all my members that I have received from thee, instruments to sin against thee, and I purpose not to reform; my tongue is an instrument of swearing, lying, and profane speeches; my hands are instruments of bribery and violence, continually working mischief in thy sight; my feet carry me to such and such filthy places, and abominable courses; mine own heart tells me that I fight against thee, my Creator, with those very limbs and weapons which thou hast given me. Beloved, the conscience of this so stifles the voice of a wilful sinner, that notwithstanding he acknowledgeth himself to be God's creature, yet he cannot with any comfort plead for mercy at his hand in times of distress.

But to a right godly man this is an argument of special use and consequence; in the midst of troubles he may allege this, and it binds God to help him. We see great ones when they raise any, though perhaps there is little merit in them, yet they call them their creatures; and this is a moving argument with such to polish their own work still, and not to desert them. Will it not be a prevailing argument with God then, for a Christian to plead with him? Lord, thou hast raised me out of nothing, yea, out of a state worse than nothing; I am thy poor creature, forsake not the work of thine own hands. We may see what a fearful thing sin is in God's eye, that the works of *our* hands should make God depart from the work of *his* hands, as he will certainly do at the day of judgment: 'Depart, you cursed,' &c., Mat. xxv. 41. Though we be his creatures, yet because we have not used those gifts and abilities which he hath given us to serve His Majesty, he will not endure the sight of us in that day.

But that you may the better practise this duty of committing your souls to God, take these directions.

1. *Directions how to commit our souls to God.* First, see that thou be thy own man. It is an act of persons free to covenant. Our souls must be ours before we can commit them to God. Naturally we are all slaves to Satan; the *strong man* hath possession of us, and therefore our first care must be to get out of his bondage, to which purpose we should much eye the sweet promises and invitations of the gospel, alluring us to accept of mercy and deliverance from sin and death, as—'Come unto me, all you that are weary and heavy laden,' &c., Mat. xi. 28, and so cast the guilt of our souls upon God to pardon first, and then to sanctify and cleanse, that we may no more return to folly, but lead an unspotted life before him for the time to come.

It is therefore a silly course and dangerous, which poor worldly wretches take, who think *Lord, have mercy upon them*, will serve their turn, and that God will certainly save their souls; whenas they were never yet in the state of grace or reconciliation with him, nor never had any divorce made between them and their sins, and consequently never any league between God and their souls to this day.

Beloved, when once a man hath alienated his soul from God by sin, he hath then no more command of it; for the present it is quite out of his power. Now, when we would commit our souls to God aright, we must first commit them to him to pardon the guilt of sin in them. When this is done, God will give us our souls again, and then they may truly be said

to be our own, and not before. It is the happiness of a Christian that he is not his own, but that whether he live or die, he is the Lord's.

Direction 2. In the second place, *we must labour to find ourselves in covenant with God*; that is, *to find him making good his promises to us, and ourselves making good our promises to him.* For a man cannot commit himself to God, unless he find a disposition in his heart to be faithful to him.

There is a passive fidelity, and an active. 1. Passive faithfulness is in the things that we give trust unto, as, such a one is a sure, trusty man, therefore I will rely upon him. 2. Active faithfulness in the soul is, when we cast ourselves upon a man that is trusty, and depend upon him. The more a man knows another to be faithful, the more faithful he will be in trusting of him; and thus we must trust God, if ever we expect any good at his hands; and our dependence on him binds him to be the more faithful to us. He is counted a wicked man indeed, that will deceive the trust committed to him. Trust begets fidelity; it makes a good man the more faithful, when he knows he is trusted.

Learn therefore to know thyself to be in covenant with God, and to trust him with all thou hast; train up thyself in a continual dependence upon him. He that trusts God with his soul, will trust him every day in everything he hath or doth. He knows well, that whatsoever he enjoys is not his own, but God's; and this stirs him to commit all his ways and doings to his protection, esteeming nothing safe but what the Lord keeps. He sees 'it is not in sinful man to direct his own steps,' Jer. x. 23; and therefore resigns up his estate, his calling, his family, whatsoever is near and dear unto him, to the blessed guidance and direction of the Almighty. Oh, thinks he, that I were in covenant with God, that he would own me for his, and take the care of me, how happy should my condition then be!

He will likewise commit the church and state wherein he lives to God; and strengthens his faith daily by observing God's faithful dealing with his people in every kind.

How behoveful it is for Christians thus to inure themselves to be acquainted with God by little and little, first trusting him with smaller matters, and then with greater. How can a man trust God with his soul, that distrusts him for the petty things of this life? 'They that give to the poor are said to lend unto the Lord,' Prov. xix. 17; and 'if we cast our bread upon the waters, we shall find it again,' Eccles. xi. 1. Beloved, he that parts with anything to relieve a poor saint, and will not trust God with his promise to recompense it again, but thinks all is gone, and he shall never see it more, &c., exceedingly derogates from the truth and goodness of the Almighty, who hath promised to return with advantage whatsoever we give that way. He hath secret ways of his own to do us good, that we know not of. A man is never the poorer for that which he discreetly gives. It is hard to believe this; but it is much harder for a man to commit his soul to God when he dies, with assurance that he shall partake of mercy, and be saved at the last day.

Direction 3. Again, *take heed of these evil and cursed dispositions that hinder us from the performance of this duty*; as namely, carnal wit and policy, and carnal will and affection, &c. There is a great deal of self-denial to be learned, before we can go out of ourselves and commit all to God; ere we can cast ourselves into his arms, and lay ourselves at his feet. Therefore take heed that we be not ruled, either by our own carnal policy or others', to knit ourselves to that; for I beseech you, do but think, what

is true in all stories, not only in the Scripture, but elsewhere, the most unfortunate men that ever were, otherwise wise enough, were always too confident of themselves. The greatest swimmers, you know, are often drowned, because relying overmuch on their own skill, they cast themselves into danger, and are swallowed up of the deep. Even confidence in wit is usually unfortunate, though it be great. Let Solomon be an example. You see how he strengthened himself by carnal supports ; but what became of all ? Alas, it soon vanished and came to nothing. The Jews would run to the reed of Egypt, and that ran into their hands ; instead of helping, it hurt them. God takes delight to overthrow the ripeness of all the carnal policy of man, that advanceth itself against his word and gospel. Take heed of confidence in prosperity, in wit, in strength ; take heed of whatsoever hinders the committing of our souls to God ; and alway remember, that honesty is the best policy ; and that God reconciled in Christ is the best sanctuary to flee unto. 'The name of God is a strong tower,' saith Solomon ; 'the righteous flee thereto, and are safe,' Prov. xviii. 10.

That carnal policy hinders our safety. Let Christians therefore have nothing to do with carnal shifts, and politic ends ; for they have a strong rock, and a sure hold to go to ; the Almighty is their shield. Beloved, God will be honoured by our trusting of him, and those that will be wiser than God, and have other courses distinct and contrary to him, must look for confusion in all their plots. A Christian should thus think with himself, let God be wise for me ; his wisdom shall be my direction ; his will shall be the rule of my life ; he shall guide me and support me ; I will adventure upon no course that I dare not commit my soul with comfort to God in.

Oh beloved, if we tender our own welfare, let us shun all unwarrantable courses, and adventure upon no action whatsoever, wherein we cannot upon good grounds desire the Lord's protection. It is a fearful estate for a man to undertake such courses, as that he cannot if he were surprised by judgment, suddenly commit himself to God in. The throne of iniquity shall not abide with God ; he will not take a wicked man by the hand, nor own him in a distressful time.

Study therefore, I beseech you, to be always in such a blessed condition, as that you may, without tempting of God, in a holy boldness of faith, resign up your souls to him. A guilty conscience cannot seek the Lord ; naturally it runs away from him. Peace is not easily gotten, nor the gap soon made up ; therefore preserve conscience clear and unspotted, if thou wouldst have God thy refuge in time of need. Adam when he had sinned ran from God ; Peter, when our Saviour discovered more than an ordinary majesty in his miracles, said, 'Lord, depart from me, I am a sinful man,' Luke v. 8. It is the work of flesh and blood to depart from God, but when a man goes to God, it is a sign he hath more than flesh and blood in him ; for this cannot be done without a supernatural work of faith ; which alone will make a sinful conscience fly to God, and look to him as a father in Christ, and desire him by his almighty power, whereby he created heaven and earth, to create faith in the soul. And when thou hast cast thy soul into the arms of the Almighty, labour to settle it there, and to quiet thyself in the discharge of thy duty ; say thus, now I have done that which belongs to me, let God do that which belongs to him ; I will not trouble myself about God's work, but in well-doing commit my soul to him, and let him alone with the rest.

Christians should not outrun God's providence, and say, what shall become of me ? this trouble will overwhelm me ! &c. but serve his providence in the use of the means, and then leave all to his disposal. Especially this

duty is needful in the hour of death, or when some imminent danger approacheth ; but then it will be an hard work, except it be practised aforehand.

Direction 4. Labour therefore for *assurance of God's love betimes*, get infallible evidences of thy estate in grace, that thou art a renewed person, and that there is a thorough change wrought in thy heart ; that God hath set a stamp upon thee for his own, and that thou hast something above nature in thee ; then mayest thou cheerfully say, ' Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit ; I am thine, Lord, save me, &c., ' Luke xxiii. 46, otherwise having no interest in God, how canst thou expect any favour from him ? Oh the sweet tranquillity and heaven upon earth which those enjoy who have God to be their friend !

This lays a heavy prejudice upon antichristian religion, which maintains a doctrine of doubting, affirming that we ought not to labour for assurance of God's favour. Oh beloved, what deprives a poor Christian soul of comfort more than this ? Alas ! how can a man at the hour of death commit his soul into the hands of Almighty God, that staggers whether he be his child or no ? and knows not whether he shall go to heaven or hell ? Therefore it should be our daily endeavour, as we would have comfort in the time of resigning and giving up our souls to God, to gather evidences of a good estate ; that we are in covenant with him ; that he is our Father ; and that we are his children in Christ Jesus.

For will a man trust his jewels with an enemy, or with a doubtful friend ? How can the swearer commit his soul to God ? How can loose livers and your filthy, unclean wretches, that live in continual enmity against the Lord, commit themselves with any comfort unto him ? They pray, ' Lead us not into temptation, ' Mat. vi. 13, and yet run daily into temptations, into vile houses and places of wickedness, wherein they feed their corruptions, and nothing else. They say, ' Give us this day our daily bread, ' and yet use unwarrantable courses, seeking to thrive by unlawful means.

Beloved, a man can commit his soul with no more comfort to God than he hath care to please him. If a man knows such a one hath his evidences and leases, and may hurt him when he list, how careful will he be of provoking or giving offence to such a man ? Suppose we knew a man that had the keeping of a lion, or some cruel beast, and could let it loose upon us at his pleasure, would we not speak such a one fair, and give him as little cause of discontent as may be ? Beloved, God hath devils and wicked men in a chain, and can, if we offend him, set loose all the powers of darkness upon us ; he can make conscience fly in our faces, and cause us to despair and sink. All our evidences and assurances of salvation are in God's hands ; he can bring us into a state full of discomfort and misery, and make us in a manner to feel the very flashes and scorplings of hell itself. Oh who would offend this God, much less live in the practice of any sin, and yet think of committing their souls to him !

Direction 5. To encourage you the more to trust in God, *observe the constant course of his dealing towards you.* ' Lord, thou hast been my God from my youth, ' saith David ; ' upon thee have I hung ever since I was took out of my mother's womb ; forsake me not in my gray hairs, when my strength faileth me, ' &c., Ps. lxxi. 6, 9, xvii. 18. We should gather upon God, as it were, from former experience of his goodness, and trust him for the time to come, having formerly found him true. Beloved, it is good to lay up all the experiments of God's love we can, that we may trust him at the hour of death ; for all our strength then will be little enough to uphold our faith. When many troubles shall meet in one, as it were in a

centre, then a world of fears and distractions will seize upon our souls, the guilt of sin past, thoughts of judgment to come, forsaking of our former lusts and delights, trouble of mind, pain of body, &c. We have need of much acquaintance with God, and assurance of his love at such a time. Therefore let us learn daily to observe the experience of his goodness towards us, how when we have committed ourselves to him in youth, he hath been a God from time to time in such and such dangers to us. Ancient Christians should be the best Christians, because they are enriched with most experiences. It is a shame for ancient Christians to stagger, when they yield up their souls to God, as if they had not been acquainted with him heretofore. You see how David pleads to God, 'Thou hast redeemed me,' Ps. xxxi. 5; he goes to former experience of his mercy; therefore now into thy hands I commend my spirit in this extremity. This psalm is a practice of this precept; here is the precept, 'Commit your souls to God, as a faithful Creator;' here is the practice of David, 'Into thy hands I commend my spirit, for thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth,' &c. Therefore, I beseech you, let us treasure up experience of God's goodness, that so when extremities shall come, we may go boldly to him, upon former acquaintance with his majesty; and being strengthened with former experience. I beseech you, let us labour to practise these and the like rules prescribed, to encourage us in the performance of so necessary a duty.

Obj. But will not God keep us without we commit ourselves unto him?

Ans. We must commit our souls to God if we would be preserved. I answer, God having endued us with understanding and grace, will do us good in the exercise of those powers and graces that he hath given us; he will preserve us, but we must pray for it. Christ himself must ask before he can have: 'Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance,' Ps. ii. 8, &c. We should therefore make it a continued act, every day of our lives, to commit all we have to the Lord's disposal; and to that end observe how he dischargeth the trust committed to him upon all occasions; how faithful he is in delivering his poor church in greatest extremities, and ourselves also even in our worst times. 'Thou never failest those that trust in thee,' saith David, and 'How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God, therefore the children of men shall trust under the shadow of thy wings,' Ps. xxxvi. 7. Daily experience of God's lovingkindness will make us daily to trust under the shadow of his wings. It should therefore be our continual course to observe the goodness, kindness, faithfulness, and other attributes of God, and often to support our souls with them.

Think, I beseech you, how he numbers the very bones of men; they are all written in his book of providence; he knows every joint, every part which he hath made; he knows his own workmanship; therefore we may well commit our souls to him. Doth God number our superfluities, and not our natural and essential parts? Even our very hairs are numbered; our tears are taken notice of, and put into his bottle; our steps are told; our desires are known; our groans are not hid. We shall not lose a sigh for sin, so particular is God's providence. He watcheth continually over us. There is not any of our members but they are all written in his book, so that he will not suffer 'a bone to be broken,' Ps. xxxiv. 20. We should therefore daily resign up our souls to his merciful tuition,* and bind ourselves to lead unblameable lives before him, resolving against every sinful course, wherein we would be afraid to look his Majesty in the face. What a comfortable life were the life of Christians, if they would exercise them-

* That is, 'protection.'—ED.

selves to walk as in the presence of the Almighty ! This is that which the Scripture speaks of Enoch, Gen. v. 24, and the rest, who are said to have walked with God ; that is, to have committed themselves and their souls to him, as to a faithful Creator.

Obj. Of wicked men's preserving, who do not commit their souls to God. It may be objected, here is a great deal of labour and striving against corruptions indeed ; may not a man walk with God without all this ado ? We see wicked men, that never commit their souls to God, grow fat and lusty, and have as good success in the world as the strictest men that are.

Ans. 1. I answer, God many times preserves such wretches ; but, alas ! that preservation is rather a reservation for a worse evil to come upon them. ' There is a pit a-digging for the wicked,' Ps. xxxvii. 13, 38. He flourisheth and bears out all impudently, under hope of success ; but his grave is a-making, and his present prosperity will but aggravate his future misery.

2. Sometimes God preserves wicked men for other ends. It may be he hath some to come of their loins, who of wicked shall be made good.

3. Again, God will be in no man's debt. Those that are civilly good shall have civil prosperity, as the Romans had. They had a commonwealth well governed, and they prospered many years together. As Chaucer observes, God preserves wicked men from many calamities ; he gives them civil wisdom, good carriage, &c. ; and answerable to those common gifts, he gives them preservation and protection, &c. ; but then there is vengeance on their souls the while. Those that commit not themselves carefully and watchfully to God, have dead, secure souls, without any life of grace or power of godliness in them. I speak this to waking Christians, that would know in what case they should live ; walking in the sense and assurance of God's love ; they, I say, ought to practise this duty of committing the keeping of their souls to God in well-doing, as to a faithful Creator.

What it is to commit our souls to God. Neither is it so easy a matter to commit our souls to God as many fondly imagine. It is not the mumbling over a few prayers, saying, Lord, receive my soul, &c., will serve the turn. These are good words indeed, and soon learned ; but, alas ! who cannot do this ? Our study, therefore, should be to know the depth and meaning of the same ; how that we are not only to commit the essence of our souls to God, that he would take them into heaven when we die ; but also to commit the affections of our souls to him, that he might own us and govern us whilst we live ; for how are our souls known, but by those active expressions in our affections, which immediately issue from them, when we commit all our thoughts, desires, and affections to him, setting him highest in our souls, and making him our hope, our trust, our joy, our fear, &c. ?

Thus I have spoken of the duty, and of the *thing* to be committed, *our souls* ; and to *whom*, to God ; and the *manner*, in well-doing ; and *why* ? because he is a faithful Creator.

Now, I beseech you, consider how nearly it concerns us all to be thoroughly acquainted with the practice of this duty. God knows what extremities we may fall into. Certainly in what condition soever we be, either public or private, whether in contagion and infection, or war and desolation, happy are we if we have a God to go to. If we have him to retire to in heaven, and a good conscience to retire to in ourselves, we may rest secure. ' Though the earth be removed, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea,' Ps. xlv. 2, 4, yet we shall be safe ; that is, though the order of nature were confounded, yet there is a river shall refresh the house of God. There are chambers of divine protection, that the

Christian enters into, as the prophet saith, 'Enter into thy chambers,' Isa. xxvi. 20; and God is his habitation still. If a Christian had no shelter in the world, yet he hath an abiding place in God continually; as God dwells in him, so he dwells in God. Satan and all other the enemies of man must break through God before they can come to us, when once we commit ourselves to him, as to a tower and habitation, and enter into him as into an hiding place. The enemies must wrong him before they can hurt us, so blessed an estate it is to be in God, having commended our souls to him, as unto a *faithful Creator*.

Obj. But we see many of God's dear children, that commit themselves to his care and protection, miscarry, and go by the worst in the world.

Ans. 1. Beloved, it is not so, for when they commit themselves to God, they are under safety; and if he keep them not *out* of trouble, yet he will preserve them *in* trouble. 'I will be with thee in the fire, and in the water,' saith God, Isa. xl. He saith not, I will keep you out of the fire, and out of the water, for he brought many holy martyrs into it; some were drowned, some burned, &c. Though God will not keep us out of trouble, yet he will preserve our spirits in trouble; nay, God many times by a small trouble preserves us from a greater. Even the sufferings of the godly are oft preservations to them. Was not Jonah preserved by the whale? What had become of him if that had not swallowed him up? A whale that one would have thought should be a means to destroy him, was a means to carry him to the coast, and bring him safely to land.

Again, God seems for a time indeed to neglect his children when they commit themselves unto him, but mark the issue; 'all the works of God are beautiful in their season,' Eccl. iii. 11. He suffers them it may be, a long time to be in danger and trouble, till he hath perfected the work of mortification in their hearts, and crucified their confidence in earthly things, till he hath made them more sensible of the evil of sin, and watchful against it; but wait a while, and you shall see 'that the end of the righteous man is peace,' Ps. xxxvii. 37.

God's presence and assistance to support his children in trouble is invincible; they have gladness and comfort that we wot not of; they commit the safety of their souls to God, and he seems to neglect them, if we look to their outward man, but they have a paradise in their conscience. God preserves their souls from sin, and their consciences from despair. They have an invisible protection. There was a fence about Job that the devils saw, and a guard of angels that Elias saw, and that his servant saw afterwards, 2 Kings vi. 14, 15. Wicked men see not the guard of spirits that is about the children of God; as Christ saith, 'they have meat the world knows not of,' John iv. 32; they feed on hidden comforts.

As for carnal men, they do not commit themselves to God; they have no preservation, but rather a reservation to further evil. Pharaoh was kept from the ten plagues, but was drowned in the sea at last; and Sodom was kept by Abraham; he fought for them, but yet it was destroyed with fire and brimstone afterwards.

Let us then try our trust in God. Those that intend to embark themselves and their estates in a ship, will be sure to try it first. This committing of our souls to God, must be our ship to carry us through the waves of this troublesome world to the heavenly Canaan of rest and peace. We should therefore search and prove the same, whether it be indeed safe and sound, able to support our souls in the evil day, and not leak and prove insufficient for us.

How to know when we trust God aright. Trial 1. Those that commit themselves to God aright, are far from tempting his majesty. God will be trusted, but not tempted. What though things fall not out according to thy expectation; yet wait thou, and think God hath further ends than thou knowest of. God will do things in the order of his providence, therefore if we neglect that, it is our own fault if he do not help us. If Christ had committed his health to God, and had cast himself down from the pinnacle, what an act had this been! but he would not so tempt the Almighty. Neither should we unadvisedly run into dangers, but serve his providence upon all occasions. God useth our endeavour to this very end. He saves us not always immediately, but by putting wisdom into our hearts to use lawful means, and using those means he will save us in them. A Christian therefore should be in a continual dependence upon God, and say, I will use these means, God may bless them; if not, I will trust him; he is not tied to the use of means, though I be.

Trial 2. Again, those that commit their souls, or anything to God, find themselves quieted therein. Is it not so amongst men? If a man commit a jewel to a trusty friend, is he not secure presently? Have we not God's word and faithfulness engaged, that he will not leave us nor forsake us, but continue our all-sufficient God and portion to our lives' end? Why then are we disquieted? Those that are full of cares and fears may talk their pleasure, but they never yet had any true confidence in God: for faith is a quieting grace, it stills the soul; 'being justified by faith, we have peace with God,' Rom. v. 1. Those that are hurried in their life with false doubts and perplexities, 'What shall become of me? What shall I eat, and what shall I drink?' &c., though they use lawful means, yet commit not themselves to God as they should; for where there is a dependence upon God in the use of means, there is an holy silence in the party. All stubborn and tumultuous thoughts are hushed in him. 'My soul, keep silence to the Lord,' saith David, 'and trust in God; why art thou so vexed within me?' Ps xlii. 11. Still there is a quieting of the soul where there is trust. Can that man put confidence in God that prowls for himself, and thinks he hath no Father in heaven to provide for him? Doth that child trust his father, that, besides going to school, thinks what he shall put on? how he shall be provided for, and what inheritance he shall have hereafter? Alas: this is the father's care, and belongs not to him. Wheresoever these distractions are, there can be no yielding up of the soul to God in truth.

There be two affections which mightily disturb the peace of Christians. 1. Sinful cares; and 2. sinful fears. To both which we have remedies prescribed in the Scripture. 1. 'Fear not, little flock,' saith Christ, 'for it is your Father's will to give you a kingdom,' Luke xii. 32; as if he had said, Will not he that gives you heaven, give you other things? In nothing be careful, saith the apostle, that is, in a distracting manner, but do your duty, and then 'let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God shall keep you,' Phil. iv. 7; and therefore were we redeemed from the hands of our enemies, that we might 'serve him without fear all our days,' Luke i. 74.

A Christian should keep an inward sabbath in his soul, and go quietly on in doing all the good he can. What a fearful thing is it to see men lie grovelling in the earth, and live without God in the world, troubling and turmoiling themselves how to compass this thing and that thing, as if they had no God to seek unto, nor no promise to rely upon.

Trial 3. Again, where this committing of a man's self and his soul to God is, *there will be a looking to God only, in all a man doth*, not fearing any danger or opposition that may befall him from without. As the three young men said to Nebuchadnezzar, 'Our God can keep us if he will,' Dan. iii. But what if he will not? 'Yet know, O king, that we will not worship nor fall down before thy image.' So it is with a Christian; foreseeing some danger, disgrace, or displeasure of this or that man which may befall him, he resolveth notwithstanding, in despite of all, to commit himself to God in doing his duty, come what will. Whether God will save him or no, he will not break the peace of his conscience, or do the least evil. He is no fool, but foresees what may befall him for well-doing. This inconvenience may come, and that trouble, yet he sets light by these. He hath an eye to heaven, and sees more good to himself in the Creator that gave him his being of nothing, and more good for the time to come, that will make him a blessed saint in heaven, than there can be ill in the creature. Therefore, come what can come, his heart is fixed to trust the Lord, and rather than he will displease him, desert his honour and his cause, or do any unworthy action, he will commit himself to God in the greatest dangers.

Reason of trusting in God. The ground hereof is this: a Christian is the wisest man in the world, and he understands well enough that God is all-sufficient. He sees there is a greater good in God than he can have in the creature, and counts it madness to offend God to please the creature; because there is a greater evil to be expected from God than from the creature, though it were the greatest monarch in the world. Considering, therefore, that he hath his best good in his union with God, and in keeping his peace with him, he will not break with him for any creature. And thus he doth wisely, for he knows if he lose his life he shall have a better life of God than he hath in his body; for God is his life, God is his soul and his comfort, and he hath his being from God. He is his Creator, and he hath a better being in God when he dies than he had when he lived; for our being in God makes us happy, and therefore Christ saith, *He that loves his life*, before God and a good cause, *hates it*, and *he that hates his life* when Christ calls for it, *loves it*, John xii. 25, for he hath a better life in him. We give nothing to God, but he returns it a thousand times better than we gave it. Let us yield our lives to him. We shall have them in heaven if they be taken away on earth. He will give us our goods a thousandfold. We shall have more favour in God than in any creature, and therefore a Christian, out of this ground, commits himself to God, though he foresee never so much danger like to fall upon him.

Trial 4. Again, if we do *in deed and not in pretence* commit ourselves to God, as to a faithful Creator, *we will not limit his majesty*, as many carnal hearts do. Oh, if God will do so and so for them, then they would trust him. If they had but so much to live on a year, and such comings in, &c., then they would depend upon God. But they must have a pawn and so much in hand first. What a shame is it that we should trust the vilest man in the world as far as we see him, and yet, unless we have somewhat to lean on, we will not trust God! Beloved, when a man limits God in anything, such a one may talk, but he trusts him not at all. Indeed, we should indent with God, and tie him to look to the salvation of our souls; but for other things leave them to his own wisdom, both for the time, for the manner and measure, do what he will with us. Suppose it come to the cross, hath he not done greater matters for us? Why then should we distrust him in lesser? If times come that religion flourish or goes down-

ward, yet rely on him still. Hath he not given his Son to us, and will he not give heaven also? Why do we limit the Holy One of Israel, and not cast ourselves upon him, except he will covenant to deal thus and thus with us?

A true Christian hath his eye always heavenward, and thinks nothing too good for God. O Lord, saith he, of thee I have received this life, this estate, this credit and reputation in the world. I have what I have, and am what I am of thee, and therefore I yield all to thee back again. If thou wilt serve thyself of my wealth, of myself, of my strength, thou shalt have it. If thou wilt serve thyself of my credit and reputation, I will adventure it for thee. If thou wilt have my life, of thee I had it, to thee I will restore it, I will not limit thy majesty; come of it what will, I leave it to thy wisdom; use me and mine as thou wilt; only be gracious to my soul, that it may go well with that, and I care not. Thus we should wholly resign ourselves to the Lord's disposal, and thereby we shall exceedingly honour his majesty, and cause him to honour us, and to shew his presence to us for our good, which he will assuredly do if we absolutely yield up ourselves to him. But if a man will have two strings to his bow, and trust him so far but not so far, so he may be kept from this danger or that trouble, &c., this is not to deal with God as an omnipotent Creator; for he that doth a thing truly in obedience to God, will do it generally to all his commands. So far as the reason of his obedience reaches, his trust extends. He that commits anything to God will commit all to him. He chooseth not his objects. But upon the same ground that he commits his soul to God when he dies, he commits his estate, liberty, and all he hath while he lives. He can never rely on God for greater matters, that distrusts him in lesser.

Trial 5. Again, a man that truly trusts God *will commit all his ways unto him*; he will take no course but what he is guided in by the Lord. He looks for wisdom from above, and saith, Lord, though it is not in me to guide my own way; as thy word shall lead me, and the good counsel of thy Spirit in others direct me, so I will follow thee. He that commits not his ways to God, will not commit his comforts to him. God must be our counsellor as well as our comforter. Therefore the wise man bids us 'acknowledge God in all our ways, and lean not to our own wisdom,' Prov. iii. 5. Most men look how safe their counsels are, not how holy and agreeable to God. Is this to trust in him? Will God save us at last, and yet suffer us to live as we list now? Deceive not yourselves; he that will have his soul saved must commit it to God beforehand to be sanctified.

Trial 6. Again, those that commit themselves aright to God *will commit their posterity to him*, their wives and children, &c.

Obj. Why! do not men make their wills and commit their goods to them?

Solution. Oh! but how do they resign them? How covetous and full of distrust are they! I must leave such a child so much and so much; and why, I pray you? Because God cannot bless him else? O fearful! is God tied to means? cannot he bless with a little as well as with a great deal? Is not 'the earth the Lord's, and the fulness thereof?' Ps. xxiv. 1. Why must God have so much in hand, or else he cannot enrich and raise up thy children? Oh! consider, he hath declared himself to be the father of the fatherless, and looks to the widow in a special manner; he doubles his providence there; he provides for all, but takes special notice of them; therefore quiet thyself, they are in covenant with God, and God is thy God, and the God of thy seed also; therefore if thou wilt commit thy soul, why not thy wife, children, goods? &c.

Look into the course of God's people in all times. Those that have left but little with honest dealing, God hath blessed the same exceedingly; whereas those that have left great matters ill gotten, instead of a blessing have often left a curse and a snare behind them. Why then should men take indirect courses, and wound their consciences for worldly pelf?

Consid. 1. Consider, 1, thy children are God's and not thine; he gave them to thee at first, and he can provide hereafter when thou art gone. Thou art the father of their body, but he is the father of their soul.

2. He provided for them before they were born. Doth not he provide care and affection in the mother's heart? Doth he not provide suck in the mother's breasts? and will he not care for them now they are born as well as he did before they came into the world? It is atheism to think such a thought. Those that commit themselves to God in one thing will do so in all things, otherwise they deceive their own souls; for it is a universal act that runs through their whole life. Committing is an action of trust, and there is a kind of intercourse of trust between God and a Christian continually.

Trial 7. Lastly, those that commit themselves to God *will be faithful stewards in whatsoever he hath trusted them withal.* Thou committest thyself and thy health and estate to God, and at length thou wilt commit thy soul when thou diest unto him. Very well; but what doth God trust thee withal? Hath he not trusted thee with a body and a soul, with a portion of goods, with place, time, strength, and abilities to do good? Hast thou not all thou hast from God as a steward, to improve for thy Master's advantage? If ever thou expectest the performance of what thou hast put in him, be faithful in that trust which he hath committed to thee. Those that have misused their bodies and wounded their souls in their lives, how can they commit them to God at their deaths? How dares the soul look up to him, when the life hath been nothing else but a perpetual offending of his majesty?

I beseech you, let us learn this wholesome lesson! Great is our benefit thereby. 'He that trusts in the Lord shall be as Mount Sion, that cannot be moved.' We may be shaken, but shall never be removed. The earth is shaken with earthquakes, but the earth keeps its own centre still. Our best peace is in God, and our chiefest safety in his protection. 'I laid me down to rest, because thou, Lord, watchest over me,' Ps. iii. 5, saith the prophet; and, 'Return, O my soul, to thy rest, for the Lord hath been very beneficial to thee,' Ps. cxvi. 7. Is it not a good thing to have a sweet security of soul that whether I sleep or wake, whether I be at home or abroad, live or die, I have a providence watching over me better than mine own? When I yield myself up to God, his wisdom is mine, his strength is mine; whatsoever he hath it is for me, because I am his. What a heaven upon earth is this, that a Christian, out of a holy familiarity with God, can resign up his soul to him upon all occasions! Set heaven and salvation aside, what greater happiness can be desired? How sweet is a man's rest at night after he hath yielded himself to God by faithful prayer?

Use. Exhortation. I beseech you, let us be acquainted with the practice of this duty, and labour to be in such a state as God may own us, and receive our poor souls to himself. Let us keep them pure and undefiled, and labour to improve our talents, that when we give anything to God, we may say, Lord, according to the grace I have received I have kept it, and therefore now return it to thee again.

Beloved, when trouble of conscience comes, when sickness and death comes, what will become of a man that hath not this sweet acquaintance with

God? He was a stranger to God in the time of prosperity, and God is now a stranger to him in adversity. Saul was a profane-spirited man; he did not acquaint himself with God in the time of his happiness, and therefore in time of distress he goes first to the witch, and then to the sword-point. So fareth it with all wicked wretches in their great extremities. No sooner doth any evil betide them, or the least danger approach them, let conscience never so little fly in their faces, &c., but presently they go to cursed means, and run upon desperate conclusions.

Therefore, as we desire to die even in God's arms, and yield up ourselves into the very hands of the Almighty with comfort, let us daily inure ourselves to this blessed course of committing ourselves and all our ways to him in doing good.

'Come and see,' saith the Scripture, John i. 46. Beloved, if you will not believe me, make trial of this course a while. Did you once taste the sweetness of it, how would your drooping spirits be cheered up!

Let a man continually keep a good conscience, and he shall be satisfied with peace at last. Suppose he meets with danger and opposition in the world, this may seem harsh at the first. Oh, but he shall know afterwards what it is to part with anything for Christ's sake, to commit his cause, or whatsoever he hath, unto God, as to a faithful Creator! Then we taste of God to the purpose when we put him to it, for God will not be indebted to us. We never find such sweet immediate comfort from him as when we deny ourselves comfort of the creature for his sake.

Little do we know what times may befall us. There is much danger abroad, and we have cause to fear, not far from us. It may be the clouds even now hang over our heads. Oh, if we would be hid in the day of the Lord's wrath, and have no evil come nigh our dwellings, let us, above all things in the world, make sure our interest in Christ, and title to the promise. We should seek to know God more, and then we would trust him more. 'They that know thy name will trust in thee,' saith David, Ps. ix. 10. Oh, the blessed estate of a Christian, that now he may be acquainted with God; that through Christ there is a throne of grace to fly unto! I beseech you, improve this happy privilege; and then, come what will, come famine, come danger of war or pestilence, &c., God will be a sanctuary and an abiding place to you. A Christian carries his rock and sure defence about him. 'I will be unto them a little sanctuary in all places,' saith God. What a comfort is it to have a 'wall of fire' still compassing us about, a shield that our enemies must break through before they can come at us! He that trusts in God shall be recompensed with mercy on every side. It is no matter what dangers compass him. Though he be in the midst of death and hell, or any trouble whatsoever, if he commits himself to God in obedience, out of good grounds of faith in his word, he shall be safe in the evil day.*

* As explained in prefatory note, 'The Church's Visitation' forms the 'second part' of a volume. I annex the quaint notice for the guidance of readers, as wishing to preserve everything traceable to the pen of Sibbes:—

TO THE READER.—Reader, in this Booke there are two parts. The one begins at the *Church's Visitation*, and goes on orderly to page 240, and there it ends. This I call the *second part*. All the rest, from the beginning and so forward, I count the first part. Therefore, when thou art directed to the fourth or fifth page, because thou shouldest not looke in both nor mistake, I have set it thus: 1, 4, which is, 1 part, 4 page; or 2, 5, the second part and fifth page.'

All the separate indices will be incorporated in the general indices of our closing volume.—G.