

THE SAINT'S SAFETY IN EVIL TIMES:*

MANIFESTED BY ST PAUL, FROM HIS EXPERIENCE OF GOD'S
GOODNESS IN GREATEST DISTRESSES.

Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.—2 TIM. IV. 17, 18.

BLESSED St Paul, being now an old man, and ready to sacrifice his dearest blood for the sealing of that truth which he had carefully taught, sets down in this chapter what diverse entertainment he found, both from God and man, in the preaching of it. As for men, he found they dealt most unfaithfully with him, when he stood most in need of comfort from them. Demas, a man of great note, in the end forsook him; Alexander the coppersmith (thus it pleases God to try his dearest ones with base oppositions of worthless persons) did him most mischief; weaker Christians forsook him, &c. But mark the wisdom of God's Spirit in the blessed apostle, in regard of his different carriage towards these persons. Demas, because his fault was greater, by reason of the eminency of his profession, him he brands to all posterity, for looking back to Sodom and to the world, after he had put his hand to the plough. Alexander's opposing, because it sprung from extremity of malice towards the profession of godliness, him he curseth. 'The Lord reward him,' &c. Weaker Christians, who failed him from want of some measure of spirit and courage, retaining still a hidden love to the cause of Christ, their names he conceals, with prayer that God would not lay their sin to their charge. But whilst Paul lived in this cold comfort on earth, see what large encouragement had he from heaven! 'Though all forsook me, yet,' says he, 'God did not forsake me, but stood by me, and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord will deliver me,' &c.

In the words, we have, in Paul's example, an expressing of that general truth set down by himself: 'And not only so, but we glory in tribulations

* In the 'Saint's Cordial's' editions of this sermon, it is said to have been 'preached at Paul's Crosse, upon a speciall solemn occasion, Aug. 5.'—G.

also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope, &c., Rom. v. 3. So here affliction breeds experience of God's mercy in our deliverance, and experience breeds hope of deliverance for the time to come; and both his experience and hope stirs him up to glorify God, who was his deliverer; so that here offer unto us to be unfolded—

1. Paul's *experience of God's loving care of him in his deliverance past.*

2. *His assured hope, built upon his experience, for the time to come; set down in two branches:*

(1.) *The Lord will deliver me from every evil work.*

(2.) *He will preserve me to his heavenly kingdom.*

3. *The issue he maketh of both; as they flow from God's grace, so he ascribes him the glory of both. 'To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.'*

For the first, I find that most, both ancient and modern writers, by *lion* understand Nero, that cruel tyrant, thirsty of blood, especially of Christians (*h*). Some also understand it to be a proverbial speech, to express extremity of danger, both which are true. But if we take the words in the just breadth of the apostle's intent, we may by *lion* understand *the whole united company of his cruel enemies*, as David in many places hath the like; and, by the mouth of the *lion*, the present danger he was in by reason of their cruel malice. Whence observe:

1. *That enemies of the truth are (oft for power, always for malice) lions.*

2. *That God suffers his dearest children to fall into the mouths of these lions.*

3. *That in this extremity of danger God delivers them.*

For the second, his hope built upon his experience; both* branches thereof hath its limitation and extent. The Lord shall deliver me, not from evil suffering, but from evil works. This he could boldly build on. He could not conjecture what he should suffer, because that was in the power of others; but he could build upon this, what God would give him grace to do. And so he limits his confidence, 'He will deliver me from evil works, and he will preserve me.' From what? From danger? from death? No; here is the limitation: 'He will preserve me to his heavenly kingdom.' He will not preserve me from death (and yet he will do that whilst I can do his service by my life), but sure I am he will preserve me beyond death to a state of security and happiness. 'He will preserve me to his heavenly kingdom.'

And then for the third. After his experience, confidence, and hope well built, as his fashion is, when his heart was once warmed, he breaks out into *thanksgiving*, in the consideration of God's favours past, and to come. His tongue is large thereupon, and God hath the fruit of it. 'To whom be glory for ever;' and lastly, he seals up all with the word, 'Amen.'

'I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion,' &c. Beloved, by nature we are all lions, and nothing will alter us, save the effectual knowledge of Christ. Education may civilise, but not subdue. A sound knowledge of God's truth hath a changing power; for when the spirit becomes tender, and when the heart, which lies in a cursed estate, under and in danger of, the wrath of a just God, whose eye cannot spare iniquity unrepented of, is cited and affrighted effectually by the spirit of bondage, it will cast down, and pull sorrow from the strongest spirit, making it melting and tender. Again, in this estate, when the soul hath felt favour shining upon it; when

* That is, 'each of the' branches.—G.

the eye is opened to see the high prerogatives and exceeding riches of Christ; when we find ourselves that we are delivered from the lion's mouth, we cannot but shew that pity to others, which we felt from God ourselves. Paul thirsts as eagerly after the conversion of others now, as ever he did for their blood before, Acts ix. 22. The jailor also, a man by nature, custom, and calling, hardened in the practice of cruelty, Acts xvi. 33; yet after he had felt the power of God's blessed truth, shewed forth those bowels of pity he felt from Christ, which were shut before (i).

Let us then be thankful, that God hath changed us from being lions, and with meekness submit ourselves unto God's ordinances, desiring him to write his law, not only in our understandings, but in our very hearts and bowels, that we may not only know that we should walk harmless and full of good, Jer. xxxi. 33, but be so indeed, resembling him by whom we hope to be saved, in a right serviceable pliability to all duties of love.

And because our imperfect measure of mortification in this life, hinders us from a full content in one another's communion, let this make us the more willing to be translated to God's holy mount, where, being purged from all such lusts as hinder our peace and love, we shall fully enjoy one another, without the least falseness or distrust. Then shall we see total accomplishment of these promises, which are but in part fulfilled in this life.

Obs. 1. That God suffereth his children to fall into the *mouth of lions*, or into some danger proportionable, wherein they shall see no help from him, is a truth clear as the sun. The history of the church in all ages shews as much. Was not Christ in the mouth of the lion, so soon as born, when Herod sought to kill him? Mat. ii. 13. Did not Satan and all the spiritual powers of hell daily come about him, like ramping and roaring lions? And hath it not been thus with God's church from Abel to this present, as appears by the children of Israel in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in their journey to Canaan, being environed round about with cruel enemies, and dangers on every side, like Daniel in the midst of lions? So far God gave them up to the power of their enemies, that the wisest of the heathen judged them a forlorn people, hateful to God and men.* For particular instances, see Job and David, so near as there was but a step between them and death.

Besides, God often awakens the consciences of his children, and exerciseth them with spiritual conflicts; their sins, as so many lions, stand up against them, ready to tear their souls. Nay, rather than those that belong to God shall want that, which will drive them unto him, God himself will be a lion unto them, as unto Ephraim, Hos. v. 14,† which made David pray, 'Oh Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure,' Ps. vi. 1. Of all the troubles which a child of God undergoeth in his way to heaven, these bring him lowest. When the body is vexed and spirit troubled, it is much; but when God frowns, when neither heaven nor earth yields comfort to a distressed soul, no evil in the world is like to this. Imagine the horror and straits of such a soul, when all things seem against it, and itself against itself, as near to the pains of the very damned in hell.

The reasons of this dispensation of God are: 1, because we are so desperately addicted to present things, and so prone to put confidence in the

* Cicero. See *ante*, p. 303.—G.

† 'For I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah: I, even I, will tear and go away; I will take away, and none shall rescue him.'

arm of flesh, that unless God driveth us from these holds, by casting us into a perplexed estate, we shall never know what it is to live by faith in God alone, when all other props are pulled away, and when the stream of things seems cross unto us. That God therefore may train us up to live the spiritual life of the just, which is by faith in him, when all else fail, he suffereth us to fall into the lion's mouth, that so our prayers, which are the flame of faith, may be more ardent and piercing, rather cries than words. 'Why criest thou unto me,' saith God to Moses, *Exod. xiv. 15*. When was this? Even when he knew not what way to turn him. It was out of the depths that David cried most earnestly unto God, *Ps. cxxx. 1*; and Christ, in the days of his flesh, cried unto God with strong cries and tears, in a deep distress, and was also heard in that which he feared, *Heb. v. 7*. Strong troubles force from the afflicted strong cries. Even experience shews, in prosperity, and a full estate, how faint and cold the prayers and desires of men are.

2. Besides, it is meet that the secrets of men's hearts should be discovered; for when all is quiet, we know not the falsehood of our own hearts. Some over-value their strength, as Peter, *Mat. xxvi. 33*; others underprize themselves, and the gifts and graces of God's Spirit in them, thinking that they want faith, patience, love, &c., who yet, when God calleth them out to the cross, shine forth in the eyes of others, in the example of a meek and faithful subjection. The wisdom of God therefore judgeth it meet, that there should be times of sifting, that both the church and ourselves may know what good or ill is in us, what soundness or looseness remains in our hearts. When, therefore, we are wanting in fanning ourselves, God in love takes the fan into his hand.

It is likewise behoveful that false brethren may be discovered. Afflictions are well called trials, because then it is known what metal men are made of, whether pure or reprobate silver. Think it not strange then, when our estate seems desperate. It is but with us after the manner of God's dearest ones; why should we have a severed condition from them? Remember this, that God, as he suffers his children to fall into the lion's mouth, so he delivers them out; and that he never leaves his, especially in extremity, but in fit case of soul to receive the greatest comfort, and to render him the greatest glory. For then it is known to be God's work: our extremity is his opportunity. God will especially shew himself at such a time, and make it appear that the church stands not by man's strength. When Christians are at a loss, and know not which way to turn themselves, then is God nearest hand and careth most for them.

And this the Lord doth, both for the greater shame of those that contrive mischief (when they make themselves surest to bring their wicked plots and purposes to pass, then their designs are most frustrated); as also to draw on others not yet called; that they, seeing God's immediate care over his church and children, may come in and obtain like protection and deliverance.

The manner how God delivereth his children out of the lion's mouth is diverse.

Divers ways how God delivers from the lion's mouth:—1. By suspending their malice for the time. As in Noah's ark the fierceness of the wild creatures was stopped by divine power from preying upon the tamer, so the lions' mouths were stopped from preying upon Daniel in the lions' den, *Dan. vi. 22*.

2. *By stirring up one lion against another;* as the Persians against the

Babylonians, Grecians against Persians, Romans against the Grecians, and the other barbarous nations, as the Goths and Vandals, against them; so whilst lions spit their fury one upon another, the sheep are quiet. Thus the Turks and other enemies have kept popish princes from raging and tyrannising over the church to the height of their malice.

3. *By casting something unto these lions, to divert them another way from their intended prey*; as when a man is in danger, a dog is cast unto the lion (j). Thus, when Saul was ready to devour David, the Philistines made a breach upon him, invaded the land, and turned his fury another way, 2 Sam. xxiii. 27.

4. *By altering and changing lions to be lambs*; as when Paul was set upon havoc and mischief, God, by changing his heart, gave the churches cause to glorify God for him, of whom before they were most afraid.

5. *God shews himself a lion to these lions*; by breaking their teeth and jaw-bones, striking them with sudden and fearful judgment; as Herod, Acts xii. 23, and the persecuting emperors; and as in '88, when God with his four winds fought for us against the enemies of his truth.*

6. *By making them lions to themselves*: witness Abithophel, Saul, and other such-like enemies of God's children.

7. Again, *God maketh them friends without changing their disposition*, by putting into their hearts some conceit for the time, which inclineth them to favour: as in Nehemiah, God put it into the king's heart to favour his people, Neh. ii. 8. Esau, Gen. xxxiii. 4, was not changed, only God for the time changed his affections to favour Jacob. So God puts it into the hearts of many, groundedly-naught, to favour the best persons.

8. Lastly, *God maketh his own children sometimes lions to their adversaries*; for the image of God shining in his children, hath a secret majesty in it, and striketh an awe upon wicked men. So Pharaoh at length could not endure to see Moses and Aaron any more, Exod. x. 28; and Felix trembled whilst Paul disputed of temperance and judgment, Acts xxiv. 25.

Use; of instruction and consolation. Thus we see the Lord knows how to deliver his, and can if he will; and will do it in their extremities, when is most for his glory, his people's comfort, and confusion of his own and their enemies. Never despair therefore of thyself or the church of God: it shall, rather than fail, breed in the lion's den. Paul salutes the Philipians, from the church in Cæsar's house, Phil. iv. 22, a place in appearance little fitter for a church than hell itself. What though things seem past recovery abroad? When they are at the worst, then are they nearest mending. When the task of brick was doubled by Pharaoh upon Israel, Exod. v. 11, then came Moses to work out their deliverance. When the Jews heard news of their liberty to return from captivity, they were as those that dreamed, Ps. cxxvi. 1; they could not suddenly believe it, it seemed so strange a thing, in that their hopeless estate. Learn we then, from this dealing of God with his people, in the midst of all extremities, to allege unto God the extremity we are in: 'Help, Lord, for vain is the help of man,' Ps. lx. 11, is a prevailing argument. Allege the pride of enemies, the presumption of those that fear not God, &c., and that he only, can give issue from death, when he will. And as God brings us to heaven by contraries, so let us in one contrary believe another: hope against hope, in misery look for mercy, in death for life, in guiltiness for forgiveness.

* The reference is to the Armada, proudly called 'the Invincible.' It arrived in the Channel July 19th 1588, and was utterly defeated next day by Drake and Howard.—G.

Learn to wrestle with God when he seemeth thy enemy; oppose unto God his former dealings, his nature, his promise, &c. Job had learned this, 'Though he kill me, yet will I trust in him,' Job xiii. 15. Be of Jacob's resolution, 'I will not leave hold of thee, until I get a blessing,' Gen. xxxii. 26. Whatsoever we are stript of, let us never forsake our own mercy, Jonah ii. 8. This one word, 'I despair,' takes away God and Christ all at once. We must remember our sins are the sins of men, but mercy is the mercy of God. God will never leave us, but be with us, whilst we are with him. The world and all comforts in it, leave a man when they can have no more use of him nor he of them. Satan leaves his sworn vassals at their wits' end when he hath brought them into danger. But blessed be for ever our gracious God, then of all other times he is nearest to help us, when we stand most in need of him. He was never nearer Moses than when Moses seemed furthest from comfort, Exod. iii. 2; never nearer Jacob than when heaven was his canopy and a stone his pillow, Gen. xxviii. 12; never nearer Joseph than when in prison; Jonah, than in the belly of the whale, for God went down with him; never nearer Paul than when in the dungeon, Acts xvi. 25. A Christian is not alone when left alone, not forsaken when forsaken, 2 Cor. iv. 9. God and his angels supply them the want of other comforts. Is it not a greater comfort that a prince should come in person to a subject and cheer him up, than send a meaner man? 'And whence is this to me,' said Elizabeth, 'that the mother of my Lord should come unto me? Luke i. 43. Is it not the greatest comfort to a Christian soul when God, in want of means, comes immediately himself unto us, and comforts us by his Spirit? For in defect of second causes, comforts are ever sweetest. Therefore, in all extremities let us wait and hope still for mercy. 'If the vision stay,' saith Habakkuk, 'wait, for it will come,' Hab. ii. 3.

Differences of godly and wicked. This is a main difference betwixt the child of God and a person destitute of sound grace; for the child of God in extremity, recovers himself, as David, after a great conflict, gets still the upper hand, 'Yet, my soul, keep thou silence unto God, for God is yet good to Israel,' Ps. lxxiii. 1, as if he should say, Though, when I look upon my present outward condition, I stagger, yet, when I consider more deeply of his dealing, I am resolved God is good to Israel. Thus, after much tossing, they get up upon that rock which is higher than they. But those who are not upright-hearted, in any great extremity, sink down with despair, as heavy bodies, to the centre of the earth, without stop. The reason is, in their best estate they never were acquainted with relying upon God, but bore themselves up with fleshly helps, which, being taken away, they must needs fall downright. But a sincere Christian, in midst of his flourishing estate, acquainteth himself with God, and sets not his heart upon present things. Job says, that which he feared in his best case, that befel unto him, Job iii. 25. Therefore they can rest upon God's mercy when other props are taken away.

Of our support in spiritual losses. Yet there be divers degrees of uphold-ing us when we are at a spiritual loss. For usually, in what measure we, in the times of our peace and liberty, inordinately let loose our affec-tions, in that measure are we cast down, or more deeply in discomfort. When our adulterous hearts cleave to outward things more than becomes chaste hearts, it makes the cross more sharp and extreme. For that which is not enjoyed with over much pleasure, is parted withal without over much grief. But for spiritual extremities, oftentimes the strongest, feel them with

quickest sense; for God herein respects not always sins past, or more or less measure of grace, as in Job's case, who could, without much distemper of soul, endure extremities of body and estate, but when God wrote bitter things against him, presently he begins to sink, and but begins only; for when he was at worst, he stays himself upon his Redeemer, to the glory of God's grace, and shame of the devil. Thus sometimes God makes his children triumph, whom he sets as champions in defiance of Satan. They, in weakness, think they shall utterly fail and perish, but their standing out in greatest conflicts shews the contrary.

But to come to that which I intend chiefly to insist on, 'the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work,' &c., wherein we may see—

1. *The author of his safety.*

2. *The deliverance itself.*

The author is the Lord. No less than an almighty power is necessary to deliver from any evil work. For such is our inclinableness to join with temptation, such the malice and strength of our enemy, so many be the snares, and so cunningly spread in everything we deal withal, that whatsoever delivereth us must be above Satan and our own evil hearts; more wise, more powerful, more gracious to preserve us than any adverse power can be to draw us unto evil works. In which case, well said Moses when God, in his wonted glorious presence, refused to go along with them. O, saith Moses, if thou go not with us, carry us not hence, *Exod. xxxiii. 15.*

'Deliver' supposeth danger, possible or present. Beloved, our lives are such as stand in need of perpetual deliverance. Our estate here is wavering. The church lives always in tents, and hath never any hope of rest until the day of triumph. Therefore, after forgiveness of sins, follows 'lead us not into temptation;' because, though sins past be forgiven, yet we are in danger to be led into temptation. Let none promise a truce to himself, which God promiseth not. If Satan and our corruptions join, we cannot be quiet. After sins of youth we are in danger of sins of riper age; for though by grace, in some sort, sin be subdued, yet, until it be wholly mortified, there will be some stirring up, until that which is imperfect in us be abolished.

But I hasten to that which follows. 'The Lord will deliver me from every evil work.'

Whence, from the form of the argument, observe that we ought to reason with God from former experience to future, *1 Sam. xvii. 37; 2 Cor. i. 10.* Yea, it is a binding argument with God. He loves to be sued and pressed from former mercies, and suffers them to be bonds unto him. Men will not do so, because their fountain is soon drawn dry; but God is a spring that can never be emptied. As he was able to help in former time, so he is also for the time to come. He is always, I AM JEHOVAH; always where he was; his arm is not shortened. What he hath done heretofore he can do now.

Use. We should therefore register God's favours, which is the best use we can put our memories to, and make them so many arguments to build upon him for time to come, as David, 'The Lord that delivered me,' saith he, 'out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine,' *1 Sam. xvii. 37.* Oh, were we but acquainted with this kind of reasoning with God, how undaunted would we be in all troubles! We should be as secure for the time to come as for the time past, for all is one with God. We do exceedingly wrong our own souls, and weaken our faith, by not minding of God's favours. How strong

in faith might old men be, that have had many experiences of God's love, if they would take this course! Every former mercy should strengthen our faith for a new, as conquerors, whom every former victory encourageth to a new conquest. So old favours should help us to set upon God afresh.

But what is the limitation here? 'From every evil work.' Which words we will first touch a little severally, and then consider more particularly of them.

Sometimes God speaks of duties as they issue from man, because, indeed, the will is man's, from whence the duty comes, and therefore the Scripture speaks, as though the duty came from us, because the powers are ours from whence they spring. Sometimes the Scripture speaks of holy duties as they issue from a higher power, from God. So here, the Lord will deliver me from every evil work, he means that God would stir up his heart to a care to avoid evil works. We are agents and patients in all we do. We are agents, because the powers are ours; we are patients, because the Lord doth all. Now it is the language of the Holy Ghost for the most part, when he speaks of good duties, to go to the fountain, especially when faith is to be strengthened.

Quest. But how doth God deliver?

Ans. By keeping us from occasions, or by ministering strength if occasions be offered. By giving occasions of good, and by giving a heart to entertain those occasions. He preserves us from evil works, (1) *by planting the graces of faith and of fear in us*, whereby we are preserved; and by peace, which guards our souls from despair and tumultuous thoughts. Yea, he preserves us from evil works, through faith, unto his heavenly kingdom, Phil. iv. 7.

In a word, (2) *God preserves his children by making them better*, by weakening corruptions, by his Spirit stirring up a clear sight and hatred of the same in them, and by withdrawing occasions which might prevail over us, and by keeping us from betraying ourselves unto them; by chaining up Satan until our strength be such as may encounter him. A great mercy it is, though little thought on, that God letteth not loose Satan upon us every moment. How should this stir us up, with David, to thankfulness and dependence upon God.

He delivers also wicked men from dangers, not out of any love to their persons, but because he hath some base service for them to undertake, to exercise the patience of his children, and vex others better than themselves, which is not fit for godly men to do. They are only God's rod, and their deliverance is no preservation, but a reservation to worse mischief. It is not a bettering deliverance.

But God delivers his, graciously, not only from danger, but from those evil works they are subject to fall into in their danger. It is not ill to suffer ill, but to do ill. For doing ill makes God our enemy; suffering ill doth not. Doing ill, stains and defiles the soul, and blemisheth the image of God in us; suffering ill doth none of this. Doing ill, hinders communion and acquaintance with God; suffering ill doth not. God is more immediately acquainted with the soul in suffering ill. Doing ill is the cause of all ills; suffering ill comes from doing ill. The ill of sin, is the ill of ills, because it is evil itself, and the cause of all other whatsoever. We may thank our ill in doing, for our ill in suffering; and therefore the apostle is well assured what he says, 'The Lord will deliver me from every evil work,' not from every inward infirmity and weakness, but from every evil work that is scandalous and offensive to him.

It is an aggravation of ill when it is manifested ; for then it either taints or grieves others. Indeed so soon as the resolution of the soul hath passed it, when the will resolves on such a thing, it is done, both in good and evil, before God. But in regard of the world, and of the church we live in ; the bringing of the work upon the stage, as it were, is an aggravation of evil ; because, besides the hurt which is done to evil men, good men are either hurt or vexed at it. Therefore the apostle saith, ' the Lord will deliver me from every evil work.' This, a Christian should especially labour for, that God in all things would keep him free from sin. Yea, this differenceth a Christian from another man. Take a carnal man when he is like to fall into danger, he studies how to get out of suffering evil, not how to prevent doing evil ; he plots, devises, and entangles himself in his own wit, and makes the matter worse by equivocation, and such like sinful courses, as we might learn from the papists, if we had not enough from our own breast. But Paul's care was to be delivered from *evil works*. For a man indeed is never overcome, let him be never so vexed in the world by any, till his conscience be cracked. If his conscience and his cause stand upright, he prevails still ; ' in all these things we are more than conquerors,' Rom. viii. 37, saith the apostle. The meaning is, sufferings cannot quell our courage, they cannot stain our conscience, they do not hurt the cause, but it gets victory in despite of them ; so that our courage is undaunted and our conscience abides unstained. Let it be our care therefore to take heed of evil works. Look into the world and see what is the care of most men we converse with, Oh, if they can get such a place, if they can get such an estate ! Aye, but it cannot be had without sinful abasement, without cracking of conscience, and unlawful engagement. Oh, say they, it is no matter, God will pardon all, I care not so I may have my wish. This is the heart of many graceless persons that are not led with heavenly respects. But take a Christian, and he had rather beg, do anything in the world, than do a thing unworthy his profession, unbecoming the gospel, or that high calling whereunto he is called. ' Shall such a man as I do this ?' Neh. vi. 11 ; he will not, and therefore his care is to take heed of ill works ; for then he is sure to have God his friend, who hath riches and honour enough for him, because ' the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof,' Ps. xxiv. 1. This is the care of a judicious well-instructed Christian.

But mark the *extent* from *every* evil work. St Paul's scare is not for one or two, but that God would keep him from *every* evil work. Why so ?

Why St Paul says from every evil work. Because he that truly hates one sin, will hate all the kinds of it. Both come from the same love of God. He that loves God as he should, will hate whatsoever God hates ; ' and have respect to all God's commandments,' as the psalmist speaks, Ps. cxix. 128. Partial obedience is indeed no obedience at all ; for he that obeys one, and not another, obeys not simply because of the commander, to yield obedience unto him ; but only to satisfy his own corrupt nature, picking and choosing what pleases himself, which belongs not to an inferior, but to a superior to do. And therefore, such make themselves gods, in that they single out easy things that do not oppose their lusts, which are not against their reputation, &c., and therein perhaps they will supererogate, and do more than they need, only because they will have a compensation with God, that he should quit with them for other things. I have done that, and therefore he must bear with me in this. Oh ! but there is no compensation here. A man is never so straitened but he may escape without sin. There is no pretence will serve ; but we must abstain from *every* evil work. Satan keeps many

men in his snare by this, and so he hath them safe in one sin, he cares not; therefore he will suffer them to hear, read, and pray, &c., holding them fast in one reigning sin, wherein he will let them alone till the time of some great affliction, or death; and then he will roar upon them. Oh beloved! we cannot provide worse for our own souls, than to cherish a purpose of living in any one sin, for that is enough for the devil to hold his possession in us by, and at the hour of death to claim us for his own. 'If we regard any iniquity in our heart, the Lord will not hear our prayers,' Ps. lvi. 18. I beseech you therefore, let us labour to have clear consciences, freeing ourselves from a purpose to live in any sin; that in all our slips and failings we may say with an honest heart, my purpose was not to do this, but to refrain from wickedness.

Again, he speaks of this for the time to come; the Lord *will* deliver me from evil. A true Christian is as careful to avoid sin for the time to come, as to be freed from the guilt of sins past. Judas may desire to have his conscience freed from former sins, but Judas cannot desire to be a good man for the time to come. Nothing argues a good conscience more than this. The most wicked wretch that breathes, may desire to have his conscience stilled, and yet never have any purpose or power to abstain from sin; but like a dog, after he hath disgorged himself, return to his vomit again. True repentance is a turning from former evils to a contrary good. Our grief no further yields comfort of sound repentance, than it hath care attending, for prevention of sin; according to that which Christ said to the woman taken in adultery, 'Go, and sin no more,' John v. 14, and as David prays, 'Purge me, O Lord, and cleanse me, but withal, establish me with thy free Spirit for the time to come,' Ps. li. 2, 12. As if he should say, Lord, I know it is not in man to order his own ways, I desire not the forgiveness of my sins that thereby I might with more liberty offend thy majesty, but with pardoning grace, I beg preventing grace. No false heart can move such a desire as this to God. A gracious heart that prays aright, prays as well that God would preserve him from future sin, as forgive him his former sins. It is a ridiculous thing of the papists to make confession of a sin which they mean to commit: as some late traitors confessed such and such things which they were to act, and were straight absolved for it. So your cursed duellists, that will pray and repent, when they mean presently to fall one upon another. Is this repentance, when a man is inveigled with the sin he means to commit; and cannot overcome himself in the case of revenge? Do these men think they repent? No, certainly; repentance is of sins past, and the carriage of every true Christian is to avoid evil for the time to come.

Again, it is here a perpetuated act: The Lord will deliver me still from every evil work. Whence you see that in every evil work we are tempted to, we need delivering grace; as to every good work, assisting grace. Indeed, our whole life, if we look upwards, is nothing but a deliverance, but if we look to ourselves, it is nothing but danger and a warfare, and therefore we have need of a deliverance. How little a temptation turns over a great man! as sometimes a little wind turns over your mighty galleys. We see this in David and Solomon; and, if God leave us to ourselves, even the strongest man in the world, how soon is he overturned! In the midst of sinful occasions, how ready are we to join with them, and betray our own souls!

But from the whole, take it as it comes from God altogether, the truth is thus much, *that a Christian, who is privy to his own soul of good intentions*

to abstain from all ill for the present, may presume that God will assist him against all ill works for the time to come. I say a Christian, that hath his conscience telling him that he means to be better, and is not in league with any sin, may believe this for the time to come, that God will keep him from evil works. I speak this, because many who are yet sinners think it in vain to strive, for they shall never be better. What dost thou talk, man? Hast thou a mind to be better? God will meet thee one time or other. Is thy will at liberty? He that gives thee the will, will also give thee the deed. Is not this the promise, that God will deliver thee from every evil work? And, therefore, away with all discouragements.

Obj. O but there are sons of Anak, mighty giants, that molest me; my sins are as so many giants to stop my proceeding; I shall never be better!

Solution. Say not so; nay, rather thou wilt not be better. Thou art in league with some secret sin, thy heart riseth against those that reprove thee of it, thine own conscience tells thee that thy heart is naught; for if thou wouldst set thyself to obey God in truth, assuredly he would deliver thy soul. And therefore the apostle, to prevent such doubts, speaks of deliverance from evil works as coming from God.

Obj. But some may object, We sin every day; and 'if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us,' 1 John i. 8.

Ans. You must not understand this phrase legally, in the rigour of it, as that God will deliver us from every ill thought, or rising in the heart, or from every outward slip and failing, &c.; but by every evil work, the apostle means every reproachful sin that breaks the peace of our conscience, that swallows up a man's salvation. From such kind of sins that bring a stain and discredit unto a man's profession, that wound his soul, and may discourage others, the Lord will deliver his; he will keep them from greater sins altogether, and from being in league with lesser. You know in falls there are several degrees; there is a slip, a falling, and a falling on all four; as we say, a flat falling. Now God will deliver his children from falling so foully.

2. *How God delivers from ill works by not delivering.* Nay, sometimes he will deliver them from evil works, by not delivering them from evil works. He will deliver from great ill works, by letting them alone in lesser ill works. God delivers from evil divers ways; he delivers from falling into ill, and he delivers out of ill when we are fallen; he delivers from ill likewise by supporting us; nay, which is more, he delivers from ill works by ill works.

Quest. How is that?

Solution. How do physicians deliver from an apoplexy? from a lethargy? Is it not by casting the sick person into an ague, to awaken that dull sickness? So God, to cure the conscience of a man, when he sees him in danger of security by those soul-killing sins, pride, covetousness, looseness, hypocrisy, and the like, suffers him sometimes to fall into less offences, to awake his conscience, that being roused up he may fly to God's mercy in Christ. So infinite is God's care this way, that he will deliver either from ill works, or from the evil of ill works; or, if he deliver not from ill works, yet he will deliver us from worse works by those ill works. Austin saith, I dare presume to say, it is profitable for some men to fall.* If a man be of a proud, peremptory disposition, or of a blockish, dull, and

* 'It is profitable for some men to fall.' Consult 'Confessio Book I., xi. 18; and Book VII. xx. 26.—G.

secure nature, it is good he should be acquainted what sin he carries in his breast, where his corruptions are, &c., that so he may know himself and his danger the better.

Use. I beseech you make use of this, to help your faith and thankfulness. When we are delivered from evil works, it is God that doth it. The consideration whereof, methinks, should strengthen our faith against Satan and all his fiery darts, and encourage us to set confidently upon any corruption that we are moved to by others, or our own natural inclination. It is God's enemy, and it is my enemy; it is opposite to God's will, and it is an enemy to my comfort. God will take my part against that which is opposite to him. He hath promised me to assist me against every evil work by his Holy Spirit. A Christian is a king, Rev. i. 6; and he hath the triumphing Spirit of Christ in him, which will prevail over all sin in time.

Obj. But some poor soul may object, Alas! I have been assaulted by such a corruption, a long time, in a grievous manner, and am not yet delivered from it.

Ans. God doth by little and little purge out corruption. As every stroke helps the fall of the oak, the first stroke helps forward; so every opposing of corruption, never so little, helps to root it out, and it is weakened by little and little, till death accomplish more mortification.

But to proceed. God doth not only deliver from evil works, but preserves us to his heavenly kingdom. We must take *preserve* here in its full breadth. He preserves us whilst he hath any work for us to do in this life; and when he will have us live no longer, he will preserve us to heaven; howsoever, by death he takes us away, yet even then the Lord still preserves us.

Under-preservers of the saints. He will preserve us in our outward estate, by himself, and by under-preservers, for there be many such under God; as angels that are his ministering spirits, and magistrates, who are the shields of the earth; they may preserve under God; and likewise ministers, that are the chariots and horsemen of Israel, and good laws, &c. But God is the first turner of the wheel; we must see him in all other preservers whatsoever. And therefore the apostle, in the language of the Holy Ghost, and of Canaan, saith here, 'The Lord will preserve me,' Ps. xlvii. 9; 2 Kings ii. 12. And rather than a man shall miscarry when God hath anything for him to do, God will work a miracle.

The three men could not be burned in the fire, Dan. iii. 25 and vi. 12; God so suspended the force thereof. Daniel could not be devoured of the greedy lions, &c. Rather than God's purpose shall fail, that a man should perish before the time that God hath allotted him, the lions shall not devour, and the fire shall not burn. God hath measured our glass and time, even to a moment; and as our Saviour Christ, out of knowledge of this heavenly truth, saith, 'My time is not yet come,' John vii. 6, so let us know that, till our hour comes, all the devils in hell cannot hurt one hair of our head. And this is a wondrous ground of confidence, that we should carry ourselves above all threatenings, and above all fears whatsoever. 'Thou canst do nothing except it were given thee,' John xix. 10, saith Christ to bragging Pilate, who boasted of his power. Alas! what can all the enemies of God's people do except God permit them?

If a king or a great man should say to an inferior, Go on; I will stand by thee, and preserve thee; thou shalt take no harm: what an encouragement were this! Oh, but when God shall say to a Christian, Walk humbly

before me, keep close to my word, be steadfast in the ways of holiness, fear not man, you are under my protection and safeguard: what an encouragement is this to a believing soul!

But put case we cannot be preserved from death; for so it was here with the apostle, he died a bloody death. Why, let us observe his blessed carriage in all this, and do likewise. I regard not that, saith he; do your worst, God will preserve me still. So it should be the bent of a Christian's soul to come to God with this limitation, in his faith and in his prayer: Lord, if thou wilt not deliver me from suffering ill, preserve me from doing ill; if thou wilt not preserve me from death, preserve me from sinful works. This we may build on, that either God will preserve us in life, or if we die, he will preserve us in death to his heavenly kingdom. And *sometimes God preserves by not preserving from death*; for indeed death keeps a man from all danger whatsoever. He is out of all gun-shot, when he is once dead. Death is a deliverance and a preservation of itself: it sends a man to heaven straight; and therefore the apostle knew what he said, 'The Lord will preserve me to his heavenly kingdom.'

That is, he will preserve me till I be possessed of heaven; he will go along with me in all the passages of my life; he will carry me through all, and bring me thither at last. As the angel that struck off Peter's bolts, 'shined in the prison,' Acts xii. 7, and carried him out into the city, so God by his Spirit shines into our souls, and carries us through all the passages of this life, never leaving us, till he have brought us to his heavenly kingdom.

And not to open unto you things that are beyond my conceit, much more my expression, what a state this heavenly kingdom is, unto which St Paul hoped to be preserved! Observe, briefly, thus much:—1, It is a kingdom of all conditions the freest; 2, the most glorious; 3, the most abundant in all supplies; 4, it is a heavenly kingdom; 5, it is an everlasting kingdom.

The excellency of the heavenly kingdom. Things, the nearer the heavens they are, the purer they are. 1, heaven is a most holy kingdom: no uncleanness can enter there; 2, it is a large kingdom; and 3, an everlasting kingdom. Other men's kingdoms determine with their persons; perhaps they may live to out-live their glory in the world, as Nero did (the king that Paul was under now, when he wrote this epistle), who came to a base end. But this kingdom can never be shaken. God's preservation shall end in eternal glory.

Use 1. Here is a special ground to God's children of perseverance in well-doing. What! doth God undertake even from himself, to deliver us from evil works, which might endanger our salvation, and to preserve us until he have put us into heaven! Where is the popish doctrine of falling away, then? *Obj.* Oh, but I may sin, and so fall away. *Sol.* Aye, but God will deliver us from evil works; he takes away that objection. He that keeps heaven for us, keeps us for heaven, till he have put us into possession of it. 'We are kept (we are guarded (*k*), as the word is) by the power of God to salvation,' 1 Pet. i. 5. Salvation is kept for us, and we for that. If we endanger heaven any way, it is by ill works, and God keeps us from them. What a most comfortable doctrine is this!

Use 2. But, to add a second against that foolish, vain, and proud point of *popish merit*. We see what a strain they are in. 1. Before conversion they will have merit of congruity, that it befits the goodness of God, when we do what we can, that we should have grace. 2. When we are in the state of grace, they will have merit of condignity; but how can that be,

whenas free grace runs along in all? God preserves us from evil works, and preserves us to his heavenly kingdom, of his mere love and mercy. Where then is the merit of man? Indeed, we do good when we do good, but God enables us; we speak to the praise of God, but he opens our mouth; we believe, but God draws our heart to it: as Austin says, we move, but God moves us.*

Use 3. I beseech you, observe further here: *How complete God's favours are to his. He deals like a God, that is, fully and eternally, with his children.* If he deliver, it is from the greatest evil; if he preserve, it is to the greatest good. Who would not serve such a master? Oh, the baseness of the vile heart of man, that is a slave to inferior things, and afraid to displease men, never considering what a blessed condition it is, to be under the government of a gracious God, that will keep us from ill, if it be for our good, for ever, outwardly from evil works, inwardly from the terrors of an ill conscience, that will preserve us here in this world, and give us heaven when we have done. I beseech you, let this complete and full dealing of God quicken us to a holy courage and constancy in his service.

Use 4. And see here a *point of heavenly wisdom; to look, when we are in any danger, with the apostle, to the heavenly kingdom.* When we are sick, look not at death. Paul cared not for that, but says he, 'The Lord will preserve me to his kingdom.' He looked to the bank of the shore. As a man that goes through a river hath his eye still on the shore, so the apostle had his eye fixed upon heaven still. I beseech you therefore, in all dangers and distresses whatsoever, if you would keep your souls without discouragements, as you should, be much in heaven in your thoughts, minding the things above, and conversing with God in your spirits. Look to the crown that is held out to us; let our minds be in heaven before our souls. It is a wondrous help to our weakness in the time of trouble, not to think, I am full of pain, I must be turned into the grave, and rot, and what shall become of me then? &c. Away with this carnal reasoning. It much weakens faith, and damps the hearts of Christians.

Use 5. Again, *How doth this arm the soul with invincible courage in any trouble.* God may call me to trouble, but he will preserve me in it that I shall not stain my conscience. What a ground of patience is this! Patience is too mean a word; what a ground of joy and triumphing is it! 'We rejoice under the hope of glory,' Rom. v. 2. A Christian should triumph in soul over all evils whatsoever, and be, as the apostle saith, 'more than a conqueror,' Rom. viii. 37; considering that God will be present with him all his life long, and after that, bring him to an everlasting kingdom. What an encouragement is this! Heaven is holy, and shall we not fit ourselves for that blessed estate? There is much holiness required for heaven; the sinful, wicked, malicious, poisonous world, lays reproaches upon holiness; but 'without it no man shall see God,' Heb. xii. 24. Doth that man believe he shall obtain a heavenly kingdom, who never fits himself with holiness for it? Oh no; 'Faith and hope have this efficacy in the breast, wheresoever they are, to frame the heart to the thing believed.' If I believe a kingdom to be where righteousness and holiness dwelleth, this belief forceth me to carry myself answerable to the state there, 2 Pet. iii. 13. And therefore, saith the apostle, 'our conversation (*l*) is in heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour,' &c., Philip. iii. 20. Because he was assured of heaven, therefore he conversed as a citizen of heaven before he came there. He praised God,

* 'We move, but God moves us.' A frequent saying in his 'Confessions.' Consult Book VII., iii. 4.—G.

kept himself undefiled of the world, and conversed with the best people; every way he carried himself, as much as earth would suffer him, as they do in heaven. Certainly, 'he that hath the hope of a heavenly kingdom, is pure as Christ is pure,' 1 John iii. 3. He endeavours and aims to be holy as God is holy, who hath called him. Faith is of efficacy to conform a Christian's carriage to the likeness of him whom he believes to be so excellent. And therefore they are infidels, and have no saving faith; profane persons, who live in sins that stain their consciences, and blemish their conversation, not believing that there is a heaven. 'Deceive not yourselves; neither whoremongers, nor adulterers, nor extortioners,' &c., 1 Cor. vi. 9, shall inherit the kingdom of God. Do men who live in these sins, without remorse, think to come to heaven? as though they should come out of the puddle to heaven? No, no; 'away, you workers of iniquity, I know you not,' Mat. xxv. 41, saith Christ. Let no man cherish presumptions of a heavenly kingdom, except he abstain from all sins against conscience. The apostle, when he would urge to holiness of life, uses this argument: 'If you be risen with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ is, at the right hand of the Father,' Col. iii. 1.

Well, let us oft, I beseech you, present unto our souls the blessed condition to come, which will be effectual to quicken and stir us up to every good duty, and comfort us in all conditions whatsoever. What will a man care for crosses and losses and disgraces in the world, that thinks of a heavenly kingdom? What will a man care for ill usage in his pilgrimage, when he knows he is a king at home? We are all strangers upon earth, now in the time of our absence from God; what if we suffer indignities, considering that we have a better estate to come, when we shall be somebody! What if we pass unknown in the world! It is safe that we should do so; God will preserve us to his heavenly kingdom, and all that we suffer and endure here, it is but a fitting for that place. David was a king anointed many years ere he was actually possessed of his kingdom; but all that time between his anointing and his investing into the kingdom, it was a preparation of him by humility, that he might know himself, and learn fitness to govern aright. So we are anointed kings as soon as we believe; for when we believe in Christ, who is a king, priest, and prophet, we communicate with his offices; we have the same blessed anointing poured on our head, and runs down about us, Ps. cxxxiii. 2. But we must be humbled by crosses, and fitted for it; we must be drawn more out of the world, and be heavenly-minded first.

Rules to discern what our interest in heaven is. Would you know some rules of discerning whether heaven belongs to you or not? In brief, do but remember the *qualification of them that must reign*; those that labour daily to purge themselves of all pride and self-confidence; that see no excellency in the creature, in comparison of heaven; that see a vanity in all outward things which makes them humble in the midst of all their bravery; those that see themselves empty of all, without God's favour, 'the poor in spirit, &c., theirs,' saith Christ, 'is the kingdom of heaven,' Mat. v. 3.

2. *Faith makes us kings*, because thereby we marry the King of heaven; the church is the queen of heaven, and Christ is the King of heaven. Where this grace is in truth, happiness belongs to that soul.

3. *Those that are kings have a royal spirit.* The hopes of a young prince puts into him a great deal of spirit, otherwise, perhaps, above his disposition. So all that are kings have a royal spirit in some measure, which raiseth them above all earthly things, and maketh them see all other things to be nothing

in comparison of Christ, to be but 'dross and dung,' as holy St Paul saith, Philip. iii. 8. Those therefore that are slaves to their base lusts, to riches, honour, pleasure, &c., know not what belongs to this heavenly kingdom. What, do men think to reign in heaven, when they cannot reign over their own base corruptions! We see David prays to God for an 'enlarged spirit,' Ps. li. 12, that he might be capable of the best things; and certainly those that have this knowledge are of a spirit above the world, '*more excellent than their neighbours*,' as the wise man saith, Prov. xii. 26. You cannot shake them with offers of preferment, or with fears; they will not venture their hope of eternity for this or that base earthly thing; they are of a more royal spirit than so.

I beseech you therefore, let us discern of our spirits what they are; whether God hath established us with a free spirit or not. The kingdom of heaven is begun upon earth; the door whereby we must enter in is here. Those graces must be begun here which must fit us for happiness hereafter. As the 'stones of the temple,' 1 Kings vi. 7, were first hewn and then laid upon the temple, so we must be hewn and fashioned here, ere we can come thither. Those that are not fitted and squared now, must never think to be used of God as living stones of his temple then. A word now of Paul's use of all, and so I conclude:

'To whom be glory for ever and ever.'

When he had mentioned the heavenly kingdom, and set himself by faith, as it were, in possession of it, he presently begins the employment of heaven, 'to praise and glorify God,' even whilst he was on earth. For faith stirs us up to do that which we shall do, when we obtain the thing believed. It is called 'the evidence of things not seen,' Heb. xi. 1; and makes them, as it were, present to the soul. Because when we are in heaven indeed, we shall do nothing else but praise God. Faith apprehends it, as if he were now there, for all is sure to faith, God having said it, who will do it; and sets the soul upon that employment here, which it shall have eternally with God hereafter.

It is therefore Christian wisdom, to fix our souls on good meditations, to have them wedded to good thoughts, to have those *præclaras cogitationes*, befitting Christians, that may lead us comfortably in our way to heaven. Let a man think of God's deliverances past, and that will strengthen his faith for the future deliverances. Let him think of future deliverances, and that will lead him to a kingdom, to praise God; and this praising of God will stretch his soul, for ever and for ever; as if there were no time sufficient to glorify God, that is so excellent and glorious. What a blessed condition is this, to have God's Spirit warming our souls and perfuming our spirits with holy ejaculations, continually putting us upon the employment of heaven, till at length it hath safely brought us thither.

Here then is the use of all uses. What is the former use which Paul makes of the experience of God's deliverance? The Lord hath delivered me, and therefore he will deliver me. But what use doth he make of this, that God will deliver him? To glorify God. Here is the end of all ends, to praise God. Happy we when God's end and our end meet together. He hath made all for his own glory; and when we, with a single eye, can aim at that too, what a sweet harmony is there!

1. To direct us in this duty in praising God, let us with Paul, for I go no further than the text leads me, *seriously meditate on God's mercies, both past and to come*. Nothing moves thankfulness more than this. A Christian when he looks backward hath comfort, and when he looks forward he sees

comfort still : for preservation, and kingdoms, and crowns abide for him. If a man would praise God, therefore, let him consider how graciously God hath dealt with him. He hath delivered me already by Jesus Christ, from sin and eternal wrath ; and he will deliver me from every evil work to come, that may endanger my salvation. Think of these things, and see whether your hearts can be cold and dead or no ; see if your spirits can be straitened. Certainly both heart and mouth will be full. Thou canst not but say, in the apprehension of God's mercies, 'To him be glory for ever.'

2. *Consider the kinds of favours thou receivest.* They are either positive or privative, spiritual or temporal. Positive—the Lord will preserve me ; privative—the Lord will deliver me from every evil work. Temporal—the Lord in this life will keep me ; spiritual—he will deliver me from the power of sin. Eternal—he will preserve me to his heavenly kingdom. Think forward or backward, outward or inward, spiritual or temporal : wherever you look, tell me if you can do otherwise than break out with the holy apostle in the praises of so good a God.

And 3. *Think of the greatness of all these:* the greatness of the deliverance from sin and damnation. The apostle, to make himself the more thankful, saith he was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. He had large apprehensions of God's goodness. So should we, beloved, consider the greatness of the misery we are in by nature, being slaves of Satan, in danger to slip into hell every moment ; and when God hath secured us from this, think of the greatness of the benefit, a 'heavenly kingdom.' When we think, not only of the benefits, but of the greatness of them, it is a wondrous encouragement to be thankful. Labour then to have a due and high esteem of every mercy. God hath brought us out of *darkness into marvellous light*, saith the apostle, 1 Pet. ii. 9 ; *great is the mystery of godliness*, 1 Tim. iii. 16 ; and *the unsearchable riches of his grace*, Eph. iii. 8. He had not words big enough to express God's goodness. 'Oh, the height, and breadth, and depth, and length of his love,' Eph. ii. 18. When we consider these dimensions, our thankfulness must be answerable.

4. Again, if you would be thankful, *labour to have humble spirits, to see God in all things* ; and then you will sacrifice to him alone ; not to thy parts and graces, friends, abilities, &c. The meek are fit to pray to God. 'Seek the Lord, ye meek of the earth,' Zeph. ii. 3 ; and an humbled, meek, soul, is the fittest to praise God of any other. He that knows he is worthy of nothing, will bless God for anything. He that knows he hath nothing in himself, will be thankful for the least measure of grace. An humble soul is a thankful soul. We see it was Paul's disposition here. He gives all to God, which makes him so break out in praising his name.

5. Again, if we would be thankful, as Paul here, and begin heaven upon earth, *labour to be assured of salvation*, and perseverance in thy Christian course. The papists, that speak against assurance and perseverance, kill prayer and praising of God. Shall a man praise God for that which he doubts of ? I cannot tell whether God will damn me or not ; perhaps I am but fitted as a sheep to the slaughter, &c. How shall a man praise God for any blessing he enjoys, when these thoughts are still with him ? How shall a man praise God for salvation, when perhaps he shall not come to it ? How shall a man praise God for that which perhaps he may fall from before he die ? when perhaps he is God's to-day, and may be the devil's to-morrow ? How can there be a hearty thanks, but when a man can say, 'The Lord will deliver me from every evil work,' that by mine own weakness, and Satan's malice, I may occasionally fall into, betwixt this and

heaven? Therefore, if we would praise God as we should, let us work our hearts to labour after assurance of God's favour; let us redeem our precious time, and every day set some time apart to strengthen our evidences for heaven, which will set us in a continual frame to every good work.

Thus we see, out of Paul's example, how we should be disposed here, to be in heaven before our time. For *undoubtedly he who praiseth God is so much in heaven, as he is given to thankfulness*; for he is in that employment now, which shall be there altogether. But how long doth he desire that God should have glory? For ever and ever.

Obs. A Christian should have the extent of his desires of God's glory carried to eternity. Upon what ground? Because God intends him glory for ever and ever. A Christian that is assured of his salvation, is assured that God will eternally glorify him. He knows that Christ is king for ever; he knows that Christ is a priest for ever; he knows that the state and condition that he is kept for, is everlasting: 'it is an inheritance immortal and undefiled, that fadeth not away,' 1 Pet. i. 4; and therefore he saith, Hath God eternal thoughts of my good? and is Christ an eternal head, an eternal king to rule me, both in life and in death? Surely I will extend my desires of his glory as far as he extends his purpose to do me good. Now, his purpose to do me good is for eternity, and my desire that he may have glory shall be for eternity, *world without end*, Eph. iii. 21. This is the disposition of a gracious soul, not that God may be honoured by him alone, but of all. To whom be praise, not by me, but by all. I am not sufficient enough to praise him. To him be praises in the churches, throughout all ages, for ever. David had not largeness enough in himself to bless God; and therefore he stirs up his spirits and all within him to praise his holy name, Ps. ciii. 1, as if all were too little to set out the glory of God's infinite goodness, mercy, wisdom, and power: those gracious attributes that shew themselves glorious in bringing man to salvation, and in governing the church.

Use. Learn this duty therefore: *if we will make good to our own souls, that we are in the state of grace, we must plot for eternity, and endeavour to lay a ground and foundation, that the church may flourish for eternity.* No man can warrant himself to be a good Christian, but he that labours to have the church and commonwealth flourish; to have a happy kingdom, happy government, and happy laws. Not only to have the church in his own family, but that the church may flourish in those that stand up when we are gone the way of all flesh; and therefore to declare the mind of God, and his favours to us, and our children, that they may strengthen their experience, with their fathers' experience, and say to God, Thou art the God of my fathers, therefore be my God. Those that are called to places of dignity, should consider that it is required at their hands to labour that there should be means to continue religion, even to the world's end, if it may be, and to stop all the breaches in this kind. And if it were possible, it were to be wished that there were set up some lights in all the dark corners of this kingdom, that might shine to those people that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death.

2. One way is, *to have a care that there be no breaches made upon the sound doctrine that is left unto us, and hath been sealed up by the blood of so many martyrs.* We had it dearly. It hath been taught by our forefathers, and sealed with their blood; and shall we betray it? No; let us labour to deliver it to our posterity, from hand to hand, to the coming of Christ; and then we shall in effect, and not in word only, do that which Paul saith

here—labour to glorify God for ever and ever, both in the church and in heaven. Surely those that will glorify God in heaven, he will have them so disposed to glorify him on earth.

It is a dangerous thing when persons are naught. We see what comes of it, especially if they be great. It is said of Manasseh, when God had forgiven him his sin, yet afterwards God plagued the kingdom for the sins that Manasseh committed, 2 Kings xxiv. 3. How can this be? Because he by his sin, though he repented himself, yet set the kingdom in an evil frame. And no question but he had naughty principles; and among people that are given to licentiousness, if there be anything in great men, it will go to posterity after them. So that when governors are naught, they are not only a poison to the church and state while they live, but the mischief of it is after and after still. And so it is in the best things. If the governor be good, he lays a foundation of good for the kingdom in time to come, as well as for his own time.

How will it shame a man when he shall think, I do these things now, but what will posterity think of me? what will be the remembrance of it when I am gone? Then my name will stink. The wicked emperor Nero was of this resolution when he should die: 'Let heaven and earth mingle together,' saith he, 'when I am gone.*' He knew himself to be so naught, and that he should be so evil spoken of, that he wished there were no posterity, but that the world might end with him. So it is the wishes of those that are wretches themselves, and that lay a foundation of wretched times after. They wish that heaven and earth may mingle, that no man might censure them when they are gone. What a shameful condition is it for men to gratify a number of unruly lusts, and give such sway to them as to do ill while they live, and to lay a foundation of misery for after times.

On the contrary, what a good thing is it, like Josiah and Nehemiah, to be full of goodness while we live, and to lay a foundation of happiness and prosperity to the church and state when we are gone! What a happy thing is it, when a man is gone, to say such a man did such a thing! He stood stoutly for the church, for religion; he was a public man; he forgot his own private good for the public; he deserved well of the times wherein he lived. What a blessed commendation is this, next to heaven, to have a blessed report on earth, and to carry such a conscience as will comfort a man that he hath carried himself well, and abounded in well-doing.

I beseech you let us think of this 'for ever and ever.' It is not enough that we be good in our times that are circumscribed to us. But as God hath given us immortal souls, and preserves us to immortal glory, and a crown of immortality, so let our thoughts and desires be immortal, that God may be glorified in the church, world without end. Oh, what a sweet comfort will it be when we are on our deathbed, to think what we have done in our lifetimes! Then all our good actions will come and meet together, to comfort and refresh our souls.

Encouragements to glorify God. The better to encourage us to glorify God while we are here, and to lay a foundation to eternise his glory for the time to come, consider, 1. *God's gracious promise:* 'Those that honour me I will honour,' 1 Sam. ii. 30. If we had enlarged hearts to honour God, God would honour us. He hath passed his word for it. If a king should say so, O how would we be set on fire! how much more when the King of kings saith it!

* The dying saying of Nero has been recorded, 'Dedecorose vixi, turpius peream.'—See Tacitus, lib. xv.—G.

2. Consider that *we honour ourselves when we honour God*. Nay, the more we honour God, the more we are bound to God; for it is from him that we honour him. The sacrifice comes from him, as well as the matter for which we sacrifice. He found a ram for Abraham to sacrifice, Gen. xii. 13. He gives the heart to be thankful. The more we are thankful, the more we shall be thankful, and the more we ought to be thankful for our thankfulness.

3. *The more we praise God, the more we should praise him*, for it is the gift of God. When God sees we honour him, and frame ourselves that we may be such as may honour him, by emptying and disabling ourselves to be sufficient to do him any service, he will bestow more upon us. As men cast seed upon seed where there is fruitful ground, but they will sow nothing upon a barren heath. So the more we set ourselves to do good in our places, the more we shall have advantage thereunto; and the more we do good, the more we shall do good. When God sees we improve our talents so well that he trusts us withal, he will trust us with more.

4. Again, consider *our glorifying and praising God causeth others to do so*, which is the main end wherefore we live in this world. It is the employment of heaven, and we are so much in heaven as we are about this work. And when God gives us hearts to glorify him here, it is a good pledge that he will afterward glorify us in heaven. Who would lose the comfort of all this, to be barren, and yield to his base, unbelieving, dead heart? to save a little here? to sleep in a whole skin? and adventure upon no good action? Who would not rather take a course that hath such large encouragements attending it both in life and death? I beseech you think of these things. Christ, ere long, will come to be glorified in all those that believe, 2 Thes. i. 10. He will come to be glorified in his saints. Our glory tends to his glory. Shall we not glorify him all we can here, by setting forth his truth, by countenancing his children and servants, by doing good, and deserving well of ungrateful times we live in? Let men be as unthankful as they will, we look not to them, but to the honour of God, the credit of religion, the maintenance of the truth, &c. Let men be as they will be, base and wicked, enemies to grace and goodness, we do it not to them, but to God. Consider this. Will Christ come from heaven ere long to be glorified in us, and shall not we labour to glorify him while we are here? He will never come to be glorified in any hereafter, but those that glorify him now. As we look, therefore, that he should be glorified in us, and by us, let us glorify him now; for so he condescends to vouchsafe to be glorified in us and by us, that he may also glorify us.

Quest. St Paul saith, the wife is the glory of the husband, 1 Cor. xi. 7. What means he by this? *Solution.* That is, she reflects the graces of a good husband. If he be good, she is good; she reflects his excellencies. So let every Christian soul that is married to Christ, be the glory of Christ, reflect his excellencies, be holy as he is holy, 1 Pet. i. 15, fruitful as he was in doing good, meek and humble as he was; every way be his glory; and then, undoubtedly, when he comes to judge us, he will come to be glorified in us, having been before glorified by us.

Beloved, these and such considerations should set us on work how to do Christ all the honour we can. As David saith, 'Is there any of Jonathan's posterity alive, that I may do good unto them for his sake?' 2 Sam. ix. 1, so, considering we shall be so glorified by Christ, and that he will do so much for us in another world, we should inquire, Is there any of Christ's posterity here, any of his children in this world, that I may do good unto

them? Is there any way wherein I may shew my thankfulness, and I will do it? Let us consider that we shall be for ever and ever glorified. The expression of it is beyond conceit. We shall never know it till we have it. Let this, I beseech you, stir us up to study how we may be thankful to God, set forth his glory, and deserve well of the church and times wherein we live. God hath children and a cause in the world which he dearly loves, let us own the same, and stand for it to the uttermost of our power, maugre all the spite and opposition of Satan and his wicked instruments.

The Lord in mercy settle these truths upon our hearts, and encourage us in his most holy way.

NOTES.

(h) P. 315.—‘I find that most ancient and modern writers by lion understand Nero. . . . This is the common view of ‘the Fathers;’ and, of contemporaries of Sibbes, of Thomas Hall of King’s Norton. All wishing to obtain much learning and quaint application will not be disappointed if they consult the latter’s ‘Exposition’ of 2 Timothy, c. iii.–iv. (folio, 1658). See pp. 449–50. ‘When we consider the position of the apostle,’ observe Webster and Wilkinson, ‘the good confession he maintained in spite of desertion and discouragement, we may reasonably conceive he refers to ὁ ἀντίδικος ἡμῶν διαβολος ὡς λεων ὠρυόμενος, 1 Peter v. 8.’ (Greek Testament, with Notes Grammatical and Exegetical, vol. ii. 1861.) It will be noticed that Sibbes adopts the impersonal reference. Psalm xxii. 21, Proverbs xxvi. 13, illustrate his interpretation.

(i) P. 316.—‘Jailor bowels of pity.’ See this subject treated with no common power and pathos from the text, Acts xvi. 33, ‘He washed their stripes,’ by Bishop Brownrig, who succeeded Sibbes as Master of Katherine Hall. (‘Sermons,’ folio, vol. i. pp. 273–291.)

(j) P. 318.—‘Casting something unto these lions, to divert them another way.’ A singularly beautiful expansion of this thought may here be given from a volume of ‘Sermons,’ by the late Rev. Dr Henderson of Galashiels, with whom Sibbes was an especial favourite:—

‘Death is the last enemy,—the last with whom the believer shall be called to contend during his period of conflict and trial. When the struggle is over, which issues in the dissolution of his earthly tabernacle, it may be said that his “warfare is accomplished.” He may appear to the eye of sense to sink and perish in the mortal strife; but to the eye of faith, in the view of the angel bands who look on, and in his sight to whom belong the issues from death, he escapes and triumphs. He has passed from the land of the enemy—from the field of war and danger. He has left his body, indeed, behind, a prey to corruption. Death may wreak on *it* his fury. *But it is as one who has thrown down his garment to be torn and trampled by the wild beasts in its rage; while he himself hastens away to the refuge which opens before him.* So does the soul enter into rest. . . .’ (Sermons on Doctrinal and Practical Subjects. 1 vol. 8vo, 1843, pp. 244–5.)

(k) P. 326.—‘We are kept (we are *guarded*, as the word is).’ Sibbes very frequently quotes this text; and invariably returns upon his rendering of ‘guarded’ instead of ‘kept.’ Demarest, who adopts it, may profitably be consulted. (Translation and Exp. of 1 Peter. New York, 1851.)

(l) P. 327.—‘Our *conversation* is in heaven. He conversed as a *citizen* of heaven before he came there, Philip iii. 20. The original is τὸ πολίτευμα = commonwealth, or perhaps citizenship. Cf. Ellicott *in loc*, who gives the literature of the text and word.