

THE SAINT'S COMFORTS.

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NOTE.

'The Saint's Comforts' forms a moiety of a small volume (18mo) published in 1638. The general title-page of the volume is given below.* It will be observed that Sibbes's name does not appear thereon, but on the other sermons it does. Probably the name was withheld from the 'Comforts,' as being from 'Notes' without Sibbes's sanction. Next to 'The Spiritual Favourite,' this volume is the rarest of his books. I have been able to trace only another copy besides my own, viz., that in the Bodleian. I have to acknowledge the kindness of the Rev. Henry Creswell of Canterbury in procuring 'The Saint's Comforts' for me. The other sermons will be found in their place in Vol. VII.

G.

* THE SAINTS COMFORTS.

Being the substance of diverse Sermons Preached on, *Psal.* 130. the beginning.

The *Saints Happinesse*, on *Psal.* 73. 28.

The *Rich Pearle* ; on *Math.* 13. 45, 46.

The *Successes* of the *Gospell*, on, *Luk.* 7. 34, 35.

Marcs Choyce, on *Luk.* 10. 38, 39, 40.

By a Reverend Divine now
with God.

Printed at *London* by *Tho. Cotes*, and
are to be sold by *Peter Cole*, at the signe of the
Glove in *Corne-hil* neere the *Exchange*. 1638.

On reverse—

Imprimatur,
Tho. Wykes. Octob. 5. 1637.

THE SAINT'S COMFORTS:

AN EXPOSITION UPON PSALM CXXX.

Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O God.—VER. 1.

This psalm is a pithy psalm, and therefore is called a psalm of degrees. Other reasons the Jews give of this title, but they agree not. Some will have it that these psalms were sung upon the fifteen stairs that went up to the temple. Some call them thus, for that they say they were sung with an extraordinary high voice. But in these difficulties, *Melius est dubitare de occultis, quam litigare de incertis*. All historical truths are not necessary to be known, for Christ did many things that were not written, John xx. 30.

The author is not named. However, we may assure ourselves the Spirit of God indited it, setting down, first, the state of the writer, ver. 1; secondly, his carriage in that estate: 'He prayed, being in depths,' ver. 2; thirdly, the ground of his prayer, which was God's mercy, ver. 3; his own faith, hope, and patience; his waiting, is simply laid down, ver. 5, and comparatively, ver. 6; and fourthly, an application to the whole church, ver. 7, from his own experience of God's mercy and sufficiency.

Out of the first part, concerning the state of the writer of this psalm, let us observe these particulars, following in their order: first, *that the children of God do fall into depths*; that is, into extremity of misery and affliction, which are called 'depths;' because as waters and depths, so these, do swallow up and drown the soul, and because they do compass about the soul, burying it in great, terrible, continuing deep dangers; and these depths of a Christian are either outward or inward. *The outward troubles* and depths are those of the body. These God's children are afflicted with, as Jonah was when he was in the bottom of the sea, Joseph in prison, and Paul in the dungeon; and these are like the man of God to the Shunamite, 1 Kings xvii. 18, they do but call our sins to remembrance. *But the inward spiritual troubles* are the great depths; that is, trouble of mind for sin that lies upon us, causing us to doubt of our estate, to feel God's wrath, to fear rejection and excluding from God's presence. This is the soul of sorrow; other outward sorrows being but the carcase of sorrow. 'The spirit of a man will bear his infirmities; but a wounded spirit who can bear?' Prov. xviii. 14. In such an estate, in regard of the extremity of the burden of the sins of the whole world laid on him, was our head, Christ Jesus, making him sweat

'drops of blood,' Luke xxii. 44 ; and when he was on the cross, when he cried with strong cries and tears, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ?' Mark xv. 34. *But why is this thus*, that the Prince* of our salvation should be in such a depth of misery ? I answer, because it was requisite that salvation should be repaired by the contrary means to that whereby it was lost. It was lost by lifting up. Adam would be like a god ; and Christ he regained us by abasing himself. The Son of God must become man, and a man of sorrows ; and as the head was, so the members have been and must be, Rom. viii. 29, 'for we are predestinated to be like the image of his Son,' and so to pledge him in the same cup wherein he drank deep to us. In this plight we find David often, though a man after God's own heart, Ps. vi. 2, 3, Ps. lxxxviii. 2, &c., Ps. xl. 12 ; and Jonah, a prophet, Jonah ii. 2, &c. ; and Hezekiah, Isa. xxxviii. 13 ; and Job especially, Job vi. 4. But why is this thus, seeing our head, Christ Jesus, hath suffered for us ? I answer, we must suffer,

Reason 1. First, *That we may know what Christ suffered for us by our own experience*, without which we should but lightly esteem of our redemption, not knowing how to value Christ's sufferings sufficiently, which is a horrible sin, Heb. ii. 3.

Reason 2. Secondly, *By our sufferings we know what a bitter thing sin is*, Jer. ii. 19, as by the ill consequents thereof : for without the taste of God's wrath, we find nothing but sweetness and pleasure in sin ; and therefore, we have so much sense of God's wrath as to humble us, but shews not the extremity of the depth of sin, lest we should sink down into despair.

Reason 3. Thirdly, *By our afflictions and depths, we manifest God's power and glory* the more in our deliverance : for the greater the trouble is, the greater is the deliverance ; as the greater the cure is, the greater credit the physician gets.

Reason 4. Fourthly, *Many times, by less evils, it is God's manner to cure greater* ; and thus he suffers us to feel wrath, to cure us of security, which is as a grave to the soul ; as also to cure spiritual pride, that robs us of grace, dealing with us as he did with the Israelites. He would not cast out all the nations from before them, but left some that might be employed in hunting and destroying the wild beasts, which might else multiply against the children of Israel. And thus God dealt with Paul, gave him to be vexed by a base temptation, lest he should be lifted up with spiritual pride, through the abundance of revelations, 2 Cor. xii. 7.

Reason 5. Fifthly, *These depths are left to us, to make us more desirous of heaven* ; else great men, that are compassed about with earthly comforts, alas, with what zeal could they pray, 'Thy kingdom come,' &c. ? No ; with Peter they would rather say, 'Master, it is good for us to be here,' Mark ix. 5 ; and therefore, it is God's usual dealing with great men, to suffer them to fall into spiritual desertions, to smoke them out of the world, whether they will or not.

Reason 6. Sixthly, *God works by these afflictions in us a more gentleness of spirit, making us meek and pitiful towards those that are in depths*, which was one cause of Christ's afflictions : he suffered, that he might help and comfort others. He suffered Peter to stumble, that when he was converted, he should 'strengthen his brethren,' Luke xxii. 32.

Use 1. Hence therefore we learn *not to pass a rash censure on ourselves or others that are in such depths* as this holy man was in ; for the afflicted soul no sooner tastes of this bitter fruit, but presently breaks out into complaints.

* Misprinted 'point.'—G.

‘Never was any thus afflicted as I,’ thinking it impossible that there should be greater crosses, than it feels; when indeed the draught that Christ our head did drink to us, was far beyond the apprehension of mortal man, and therefore much more beyond his power to undergo. Let us beware how we censure others that are afflicted, for God’s ends are hid. It may be God sends afflictions to manifest some excellent graces which lie in him, unknown both to the world and himself; and so he set Job as a flag of defiance against the devil, bidding him do his worst. He should find him upright, and a just man; and therefore we should rather take notice of affliction as a sign of some excellent grace with which God hath furnished such; for God will not call out any of his to suffering, but he will get himself honour thereby.

Use 2. In the second place, *note this doctrine against the profane persons that tush at religion*, and make a mock at the dejected condition of those that are good, because they seem despised, afflicted, and forsaken. They, alas! are ignorant of God’s ways and works. It were much safer for them to consider their own ways, and to reason, if God deals thus with his dearest ones, with the ‘green trees,’ what shall become of those that are his enemies, that are ‘dry trees?’ If such troubles arise to the godly, even from God’s love to them, what shall defend the wicked when the vials of God’s wrath shall be poured down upon them, when they shall ‘call to the rocks and mountains to hide, cover, and defend them?’ Rev. vi. 16. If the ‘righteous hardly be saved, where shall the ungodly appear?’ 1 Peter iv. 18. And to conclude, know that the afflictions of the children of God are far better than the pleasures of sin.

Doct. 2. In the second place, observe we, though Christians fall into depths, *yet God upholds them that they sink not down into them without recovery.* Thus it was with our Head. Though he on the sudden apprehended not the presence of God, so as he thought himself forsaken, yet he could even at the worst say, ‘My God.’ Thus also Jonah, ii. 4, ‘I said I was cast out of thy sight; yet will I look towards thy holy temple.’ So Ps. xxxi. 22, and Ps. cxviii. 5 and 6 verses.

Reason 1. For the Spirit of God is in them, and where it is, it is stronger than hell, yea though the grace be but as a grain of mustard seed.

Reason 2. Again, As there are depths of misery in a Christian, *so in God there are depths of love and of wisdom.*

Reason 3. Thirdly, *Faith, where it is, unites the soul to Christ, and to God through him*, and draws down divine power—to lay hold on the almighty power of God by true and fervent prayer,—at whose rebuke the waters of affliction flee away, Ps. lxxvii. 16; and so the stronger the faith is, the stronger is the delivery, for it is of a mighty power, enabling us to wrestle with God, as Jacob did. Thus when we lay hold on God, and God on us, what can drown us?

Reason 4. Fourthly, *It is the nature of God’s working to be by contraries*: in his works of creation, making all things of nothing; in his works of providence, he saves by little means from greatest dangers. That he might bring us to heaven, he suffers us to go down even into hell, to see our worst estate, to humble us; and it may therefore be a cause why many men lie long in afflictions, even because they come not low enough to see their sins and need of help. In glorifying our mortal bodies, he first brings them to the grave, that they may rot and corrupt, and so be refined and moulded anew.

Use 1. This should teach us a note of difference between those that are

God's children and those that are not. Those that are his, when they are in danger, go to him. They have ever that hold by faith, as to say, 'Yet God is good to Israel,' Jer. xxxi. 1. Others seek to escape by desperate undoing of themselves, as Saul, and Judas, and Ahithophel, for all his strong natural parts; and indeed such are in most danger of such courses of all other; for God will tread on such for their pride. Contrarily he mingles comforts, in the worst estate that his children are in, with griefs, one to humble them, the other to support them from despair; and so he sets them on a rock that is higher than they.

Use 2. Secondly, It should teach us in all extremities how to carry ourselves. We should take heed of the stream of grief, striving against it, as we desire a note of our good estate; take heed how we think that God forsakes us. It is an imputation unbefitting him that never forsakes his. Take heed of judging ourselves by sense. Is meat sour because one that is sick doth not relish it? No. The fault is in his indisposition. So in such desertions, be sure thou retainest thy anchor of hope, though contrary to hope; and therefore in the next place,

Use 3. We should answer God's dealing by our dealing. He works by contraries; we should judge by contraries. Therefore, if we be in misery, hope and wait for glory, in death look for life, in sense of sin assure thyself of pardon, for God's nature and promises are unchangeable; and when God will forgive, he lets us see our troubles; and therefore with resolute Job say, 'Though he kills me, I will yet trust in him,' Job xiii. 15. But to come particularly, I will set down cures of such depths as may arise from several causes; and these depths are either imaginary or real. Christians sometimes think themselves to be in depths when indeed they are not, but it is only imaginary, raised it may be *from a melancholy distemperature of the spirits*, which also distempers the reasonable working of the mind; raising as false and feigned conceits of their souls as it doth in many of their bodies; and yet these conceits have real effects, as in Jacob, who sorrowed as truly for Joseph as if he were dead indeed. Therefore for the avoiding hereof be not alone; a friend and good company are made for such times. For the devil sets on men in such case most when they are alone, and the strongest are then too weak for him; and believe not thine own fancy, but rather believe those that can discern us better than we ourselves can. We know how men have been deceived thus, and therefore when we are advised thus by friends, and counselled, let us suspect that it is a motion of the devil or a fancy of thine own that thus troubles thee.

There is another depth that is imaginary, arising *from mistaking of rules*, concluding because they have not so much grace as others, have not so much subduing and prevailing power over sin, therefore they have no grace at all, they are damned hypocrites and the like. Little do they think that perfection is not attainable here, but is reserved to the blessedness of that other life hereafter. Little do they look to the imperfections of the best saints of God, and the great depths that they have been in; and indeed they know not what the covenant of grace requires, nor perfect fulfilling of the law by our own persons, for that was the end of the law. But the covenant of grace requires sincerity with growth; and this is the only perfection which we can look for here.

Another depth also there is, which ariseth *from the taking of the motions of the devil for those of his own corrupt nature*. The baseness and unreasonableness of them makes them think they cannot be God's children, and have such detestable motions within them. Let such know *that such shall*

be cast upon Satan's score. And it is a sign rather that such are none of the children of the devil, who, if they were, would suffer them to rest in quiet without vexing them.

Again, some men fall into another depth, which ariseth from an apprehension of God forsaking them. To such I give this advice, that they judge not of themselves by their distemper, for a sinful conscience puts a veil sometimes between God and us, hiding his favour; which nevertheless may be as great to us then as at any other time, and it may be intended by God to drive us to him by scourging us from our wicked ways and sins, which formerly we lived in. By faith therefore pull off the vizar from the face of God; judge not according to present appearance, but by God's nature and his promises, who hath said he will be with us for ever, that no temptations shall be above measure, 1 Cor. x. 13; judge by his nature who is unchangeable; and thus did the Canaanitish woman see Christ's loving nature under his frowning look, who doth as Joseph, hide his love and person from his brethren out of a increasement of love, not out of any ill intent. Again, in such a case let us be sure *we trust others that are our friends rather than ourselves.* I mean in time of temptation, whenas others can better discern of our health by our spiritual pulses than we ourselves, who then are blinded; and in such cases there is the trial of faith and love.

There is another sort of depths, and these are *before conversion*; and thus was Paul troubled, 'Lord, what shall I do?' and thus was Manasseh. *Let such consider the commandment,* to humble them and cast themselves on Christ and his promises, considering the end of Christ's coming was to save and seek such as are lost.

Use 4. And if any one shall find himself already escaped such depths as are formerly mentioned, *let him take comfort to himself,* as being thereby evidently proved to be the child of God; for that is utterly impossible, that nature should overcome such difficulties, and to that end let him reason after this sort, God's children go to him in depths. I go only to him in depths, therefore I am God's child; for to have the spirit of prayer to go to God in time of trouble, it is a work of the Spirit; a natural man hath it not, Job xxvii. 9, 10.

Use 5. Hence therefore, in the next place, note a *sure sign of the true religion, namely, to be able to support men in danger and in spiritual troubles.* This is verified in ours, as the subtile Jesuit will acknowledge, while they hold that reposing ourselves merely on mercy and favour in Christ, and not on man's good works, is the safest way. Why, therefore, they live by their uncomfortable rules; and when they die, fly for succour to these, which in their lifetime they despise.*

Use 6. Moreover, let this be a *ground to encourage us never to give over God's cause.* He hath said he will not leave us though we be in depth of our sins, if we belong to him, and therefore much less will he leave us in that work which he himself sets us about. He was with Daniel among the lions, with Moses in the bulrushes, with the 'three children' in the fire, with his church through 'fire and water.'

Use 7. Lastly, Let us therefore *be sure to keep God our friend,* that he may own us; else when we cry he will not hear us, Prov. i. 28. Acquaint we ourselves with him, as it is in Job xxii. 21, in prosperity, and he will be our refuge, &c.

Doct. 3. In the third place, observe we that *afflictions stir up devotions*; for prayers in time of afflictions are cries. *Oratio sine malis est avis sine alis*;

* Cf. note w, Vol. III. page 531.—G.

for what allays worldly joy, and embitters it, but affliction? Now we know that it is the worldly afflictions* that quenches our zeal and makes us cold. Affliction is a purgation opening the soul, causing it to relish and to affect† spiritually, and to see the wants and necessity of supply, and so procures longing and earnest hungering, Hosea v. 15. 'In their affliction they will seek me early,' and therefore, Ps. cvii. 6, it is said they *cried* to the Lord in their trouble. Now crying supposes want and sense of misery and ardency. Thus were Christ's cries called 'strong cries;' and indeed weak afflictions many times makes men rather pettish and froward, as Jonah, than ardent in feeling relief; and therefore,

Use 1. Let us interpret God's dealings with a sanctified judgment. He is a wise physician, and knows when strong or gentle physic is most requisite. Sometimes God by great afflictions doth manifest great graces, but so as notwithstanding they may be mingled with a deal of corruption; and it is God's use that hereby his graces may be increased, and the corruption allayed, to bring down the greatest cedars, and to eclipse the greatest lights.

Use 2. Secondly, Let us oppose desperations by all means, by prayer, by crying; and if we cannot speak, by sighing; if not so, yet by gesture, especially at the time of death, for God knows the heart. For then it stands upon eternal comfort. And therefore let us do anything to shew our faith fails not. We must know that every one shall meet with these enemies, that would cause us to despair if they could, for this life is a warring and striving life. We shall have enemies without and within us that will fight against us.

Doct 4. In the next place, observe by the example of this holy man, that prayers are to be made only to God, who knows our wants, supports us and binds us up; and it is only Christ that doth this. None can love us more than he that gave himself for us. He is our eye whereby we see, our mouth whereby we speak, our arms whereby we lay hold on God; and therefore it is an intolerable unthankfulness to leave this 'fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, and to dig to ourselves cisterns that will hold no water,' Jer. ii. 13; to leave Christ, and run to saints and angels, and the like, &c.

Ver. 2. 'Lord, hear my voice; let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.'

Mark here his constancy and instancy in prayer by his ingemination;‡ and this he doth not to work upon God, as if he were hard to be entreated to mercy, but to waken up his own heart, and to entreat of God a more inward and clear communion, communicating increase of grace; so as God's children are not satisfied with small portions of grace. And this did Daniel, Dan. ix. 18, 19. O Lord, hear, forgive, hearken, do, defer not! His ardency shews into what an exigent he was brought; and indeed the Lord regards lukewarm prayers no more than lukewarm persons, so as he will spue them out. Prayers must be like incense. It must be fired with zeal.

Quest. But some will ask, How shall we come to make our prayers fervent?

Ans. I answer, *consider of our wants, and our necessity of supply, of our misery in our want, of our hope to prevail by prayer;* and these will edge our affections in prayer. Consider also how these times, and the estate of

* Qu. 'affections'?—ED.

† That is, 'choose.'—G.

‡ That is, 'repetition.'—G.

the church do sympathy with thy particular depths. The church abroad is in great depths; and if we will have proof that we are fellow-members, that we are children of that mother, let us labour for a fellow-feeling of their miseries, and make them our own; and to that end in our prayers allege the depths and pray, 'Help thou, Lord, for vain is man's help,' Ps. lx. 11. For extremity itself is a good argument to a father to help his children. Allege also the insolency of the enemies. 'Why should the heathen say, Where is our God?' Ps. lxxix. 10. There is no church but useth more helps of humiliation than we do, which foretells a great judgment; for God cannot endure this lukewarmness. Therefore call upon God with fervency, else will he cast us into such extremities as shall force fire into us. He that is poor doth naturally speak supplications.

Direct. 2. Secondly, *Look that we always be in such an estate as God may hear us.* If we be not within the covenant with God, our prayers shall turn to sin.

Direct. 3. Thirdly, *Take heed of wilful neglect of God's word.* He that turneth his ears from hearing the law, his prayer shall be abominable, Prov. xxviii. 9. Some cry down preaching and cry up prayer, making opposition between duties where none is. Dost thou think God will hear thee, and thou wilt not hear him? Prov. i. 28.

Direct. 4. Fourthly, *Take heed of double dealing with God.* This is hateful to God, and therefore David, till he dealt plainly with himself by condemning himself, his prayers were but roaring as a beast taken in a snare and [that] cannot get out, roars for pain and despite, Ps. xxxii. 3.

Direct. 5. *Take heed, in the next place, of allowance of any sin, though never so little;* and though it be only entertained in heart, the Lord will not hear our prayers, Ps. lxvi. 18. For shall we think that God cares for our prayers when we make covenant with his enemies?

Direct. 6. *Take heed also of unmercifulness and cruelty.* God would not hear the Israelites. Their hands were full of blood, Isa. i. 15. God will rather have no sacrifice than no charity. Let us take heed of these things, and let us come boldly to the throne of grace while he holds out his sceptre to us.

But against this a man may object and say, that he is a wicked wretch, and his prayers shall but increase sin.

To such I answer, let them offer their prayers in obedience to God's commandments, who commands them to pray, and he will respect the very 'groans' of his Spirit within. Elias was a man subject to the like infirmities; yet God heard his prayer, James v. 17. Where God's Spirit stirreth up, man's spirit is stirred up; and where Christ joins to offer the prayers to his Father as in his own name, why should we vilify that which God highly esteemeth? Let God have his sacrifice. He knows how to accept of that which is good, and to pardon that which is amiss. He will second his beginnings, and will enlarge the heart more and more. Though in the beginning, prayer may be dull and untoward, it shall end in fulness, and therefore let these spiritual depths be so far off from hindering us from prayer, as that rather it should encourage us to pray. For it may be one end why the Lord suffers us to fall into depths, to the end that we may be stirred up to come to him; that thus we may glorify him, and he glorify his mercy in hearing our prayers and granting our requests. For sure it is, he that hath not a heart to pray when he is in depths, shall never come out of them; and let such as do come to him know, that however God is not present to sense, but rather seemeth to hide himself, yet he is most

near to such as, with Mary, cannot see him for their tears and griefs, if with her in humility they seek after him.

Ver. 3. 'If thou, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?'

These words are a removal of hindrances of prayer, following God with an humble confession of that which is evil, which is ever better than a proud boasting of that which is good; and thus preventing* a secret objection, which God and a guilty conscience may make, that he was a guilty wretch. To which he answers by way of confession, 'Truth, Lord! yet if thou shouldst mark iniquities, none could abide it. Whence in general we may observe,

Doct. 1. That sin hinders and discourages the soul from prayer; for the conscience will object, and the soul will upbraid us, telling us we are sinners. God, he is holy, and how can we think he will hear us then, where there is no faith? The soul must needs sink. This estate was David's, Ps. li. 14, 15. Sin and a guilty conscience had almost sealed up his lips; and thus was the publican, who durst not lift up his eyes to heaven; and thus will our estate be, especially if we yield to sins against conscience; like Adam, we shall run from the presence of God to hide ourselves, though our former estate and conversation with God were never so inward and familiar. Therefore let us look to our souls as we desire to appear with comfort before the throne of grace, for consciousness of the remainder of sin hinders boldness in prayer in the best.

Doct. 2. In the second place, the way to get out of misery is first to get discharged from sin; for sin is the beginning and cause of all misery. Therefore the sons of Jacob, when they were handled roughly by Joseph, presently the thought of selling Joseph into Egypt came into their minds, as the cause of all their trouble, though the fact was many years before; and the widow, when her son died, presently called to mind her sin: 'O thou man of God, why comest thou to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?' 1 Kings xvii. 18. If therefore we will remove the misery, let us remove sin first. Thus David began with desiring pardon, Ps. cxliii. 2, then prayer for deliverance, for misery follows sin, even as the shadow doth follow the body.

Doct. 3. Thirdly, We may observe from the general, that the way to purge and take away sin is by confession; thereby clearing God and laying load on ourselves. The way to cover our sin is to uncover it by confession. The way for God to spare us is, not to spare ourselves. And this God requires, not for himself, as if he were not able to be merciful but by this means, but to the end that 'we may glorify him,' as Joshua said to Achan, 'My son, give glory to God,' Josh. vii. 19. Secondly, God will have it a way to mercy, because he hath so decreed it; and in the third place, that thereby there may be wrought in our souls a greater shame for sin. And this confession must be serious, thorough, humble, with grief, shame, and hatred. Every 'Lord, have mercy,' is not enough, for many deceive themselves this way, misapplying the promises, that Christ will not 'break the bruised reed,' that he looks at the desire. Alas! these belong to such as are not lazy, that are plain dealers with themselves, that will not spare themselves; that by reading, hearing, meditation, conference, and all other duties, will not give over till they have found out the bottom of their iniquity hidden in their heart. And let only such apply them, and not those to whom they do not belong. Thus much in general. Now, to come to

* That is, 'anticipating.'—G.

some particulars ; and first, let us observe out of this interrogation, having the force of a strong affirmation,

Doct. 4. That the best men in the estate of grace are sinners ; some may be sine crimine, but not sine peccato ; for in every man there are two principles : one of good, another of evil, the old man and the new. In all there is a 'combat between flesh and spirit.' Christ is not a mediator for such as are already perfect ; for mediation needs not be, where all is friendly. And therefore there must be some enmity that must make God's children stand in need of the perpetual intercession of Christ, who is a high priest for ever. And the servants of God have acknowledged thus much, Ps. cxliii. 1, 'Answer me in thy righteousness,' not mine. I will not have a quarrel with thee ; thou art righteous, I am sinful. I may be just in mine own eyes, but in thy sight no man shall be justified. We acknowledge thus much in our daily prayers, while we still pray 'Forgive us our trespasses.' Though we profit every day never so much, yet, like leaking ships, we gather that which will drown our souls at length if we repent not ; for as it is Isa. lxiv. 6, 'Our best performances are as filthy rags.' Isa. vi. 5, 'I am a man of polluted lips.' Dan. ix. 20, 'While I confessed *my own sins*.' The papists themselves imply so much, for else why teach they the doctrine of doubting ? If we be perfect, it is a sin to doubt of salvation, for thereby we deny God to be just. If they be perfect, what need they force the doctrine of penance, or of going to saints to be their mediator ? And when they are upon the rack of conscience, the best of them will renounce then their dreams of perfection. From this observation, therefore, we learn, that *no man can perfectly fulfil the law ;* and secondly, that *there can be no justification by works.* Only, that that must make us just must be perfect. Our best works are imperfect.

Doct. 5. In the next place, we may observe that *community of offenders is no ground of lessening or diminishing of sin.* A formal Christian, it is his trick to wrap himself up in general confessions. We are all sinners ; and if God should deal with us as we deserve, we were damned ; but come to reckon with him for his particular sins, then he is all in a chafe. He cannot be a saint, and the like speeches, tending to the defence of his course. The psalmist is not of this nature. He argues otherwise : neither Adam nor Abraham could stand, how much less shall I, poor worm ! David, he aggravates his sin while he tells us that he was conceived and born in sin. But men now-a-days, contrarily, 'You must bear with me ; it is my natural disposition ; I cannot do otherwise.' Yet do I not deny but to the dejected sinner this may be used as a comfort ; for while they see the mass of corruption within them, they presently conceive worse of their estate and condition, as if none were so ill, or in as ill a case as they. Such should be stayed by considering it is the general estate of all men, only the difference is, some see their sins more than others do ; and thus Solomon useth it, 2 Chron. vi. 36, 'If any man sinneth against thee, as there is no man that sinneth not ;' and God himself useth it as an argument to move him to mercy. 'The imaginations of man's heart are evil continually, therefore my Spirit shall not always strive with flesh,' Gen. vi. 3.

Doct. 6. In the next place, observe that *God opens the heart and eyes of his children to see and feel what sin is,* and keeps their eyes open, and their consciences continually tender. The wicked are blind in most heinous crimes of all. David he complains of this, that his sin was ever before him, Ps. li. 3. And God threatens this, Ps. l. 21, 'I will set them before thee ;' and the reasons hereof are,

Reason 1. First, *To make our judgments conformable to his in hatred of sin*; for we being his children, it is fit we should be of his image, and like to him.

Reason 2. Secondly, *To make us apprehend mercy the more dearly*, and thereby glorify him in it the more.

Reason 3. Thirdly, *Because he would have us beg of him to cover our sins* from his eyes, that it may be covered from our eyes; for the best cannot shake off the sense of sin, be it ever so burthensome. But God keeps it in our minds to humble us the more thoroughly.

Reason 4. Again, *God's children have a new life which is sensible of the least thing that is contrary to itself*; and those that are in most perfect life are most perfect in the sense of sin, though never so small, though but motions. Where the sun shines most clear, then motes are most easily seen; and therefore the best Christians do complain most of corruptions, for they see more than others do. Hence, therefore, we may know our estate, whether we are still-born or have life. If we have life, we have light, and can see and discern between good and evil. Some are still-born, yet think they live. Thus are many, thinking themselves unblameable in conversation, yet in heart full of pride; and like the Pharisees, count well of themselves, nothing knowing what belongs to the Christian warfare. Others are more bold, and their very lives bewray they think not of sin, but are bold in their courses, proud in speech and carriage, contemptuous of others and the means of salvation, contented with a little, and think anything enough. But the worst of all are those that think indeed of sin, but it is to defend it and maintain it by translation* and recrimination. They will be sure to repay double, to those that tell them of their courses in friendly manner.

Quest. But how shall we come to be sensible of sin?

Direct. 1. First, *Let us have the picture of the law in our hearts*, seeing all ill and the degrees thereof; also learn us to desire† to avoid sin, so to endeavour to flee all occasions thereof, though never so small; and to take up all occasions of doing good; and doing good spiritually from judgment, affection, faith; and consider the extent of the law, reaching to the least thought.

Direct. 2. Secondly, *Bring ourselves continually into the presence of God.* Human frailty appears in nothing more, than when it is brought to the light; opposites being compared illustrate one another. Consider therefore in whose presence we are, what we are, what God is, what we have done, what he commandeth; and then, with Job, we shall abhor ourselves in dust and ashes, though formerly we defended ourselves, Job xlii. 6.

Direct. 3. And because God is invisible, bring ourselves to that which is divine; hear we the word often unfolded, and we shall, with the unbeliever, 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 'be convinced, and falling down shall confess God's power with it.'

Direct. 4. Furthermore, *Let us converse with those that are better than ourselves*; for the image and likeness of God is seen in his children. It is the custom of many men to converse with the worst company, that they may appear to be the best; and thus do they increase an overweening self-conceit in themselves.

Direct. 5. Let us also use to go to places visited with God's corrections; for seeing misery, the conscience retires to itself, considering of the ways of sin, and how the devil pays those that serve him. And this use we ought to make of objects of misery, to see God's correcting hand, else do

* That is, 'transference.'—G. † Qu. 'learn, as to desire . . . so'? &c.—Ed.

we provoke God, Isa. i. 3-5, 'who curseth such;' Jer. v. 3, and branding them with the brand of king Ahaz, 'this is Ahaz.' And while we delight ourselves with pleasing worldly objects, our eyes shut against sin, but corrections and punishments makes them see and discern. All Christ's admonitions could not make Judas see his sin of covetousness, which the weight of a burdened conscience afterward so wrought, as could not be pacified. Let us look therefore on the afflictions of other men, of our own persons and estates, and know the least crosses comes not without a just cause.

Direct. 6. Lastly, *Let us pray to God to give us tender hearts*; not to deliver us up to a hard impenetrable heart, and to spiritual judgments, but to keep us continually sensible of our sins and least infirmities.

Doct. 7. In the next place, out of the manner of delivery of this speech, we may gather thus much, that *sin once truly felt is ever unsupportable*, none can stand under it. There are three impotencies in sinners: first, they cannot see sin: Ps. xix. 12, 'Who can understand his errors.' Secondly, when the Lord causes them to see their sins, they cannot justify themselves; and then, in the third place, they cannot bear the burden of them; for death, the wages thereof, none can bear or endure; nay, God himself cannot endure sin, Amos ii. 13—nay, the wounded conscience, which is but a part of the wages thereof in this life, none can endure—but is 'pressed under them as a cart loaden with sheaves.' Christ he could not endure them, but had such sense of them as if he had been quite forsaken: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' And angels could not bear the burden, but were thrown down to hell thereby, and so angels of light became angels of infernal darkness. Adam could not endure it, till Christ raised him up by the promise of the blessed seed; and therefore much less can we since the fall, as it appears in Cain, Saul, Ahithophel, Judas. The earth could not bear Korah and his company, and neither would it bear us if we had our due. Sin is a debt we cannot answer: Job ix. 3, 'We cannot answer one of a thousand.'

Use 1. This therefore *confutes the papists, who say that Christ hath endured the great punishments; but there are other lighter punishments, which we also must undergo, as purgatory and the like*; to whom we say the wages of the least sin is death. That which the angels could not satisfy for, how shall we weak creatures.

Use 2. Secondly, *This may put a just defence into the mouths of careful Christians*. Let others term them by what names of scorn they list, such have good ground for what they do. They know what sin is, and have felt the sting thereof; and what they do, they do it in love to their souls. As for them that scorn, they know there is more cause to pity them than envy their estate. Though they can outswagger and outface sin now, which none could undergo heretofore, and though they can with a grace and authority, as they think, censure those that are careful, and themselves swear and profane the holy name of God, shewing thereby a heart full of unbelief and of unreverence,—which is more odious than the sin of swearing,—yet there is a time coming, when God will set their sins in order before them, in such manner that they shall melt away in the sense of the multitude and greatness of them, without hope of relief; when they shall see nothing but vengeance and death before their eyes, and without all manner of hope they shall die.

Quest. But how comes it to pass, will some say, that many nevertheless seem to bear their sins well enough, and live and die without tears?

Ans. I answer, The estate of such may be dangerous, for Christ is not

sweet till sin be bitter. But God is infinite in wisdom, not presently burdening every sinner, nor comforting those that shall desire it. For then who would not be good, and who would be ill? And if evermore comforts were present, what need were there of faith? And therefore, this is most especially true at the day of judgment, when the wicked shall be blown away as chaff, Ps. i. 4-6; when there will be a guilty conscience, watching devils, and an angry God. Where shall the wicked then appear? And there must be a hell hereafter, that men may then feel what now they will not believe.

Use of direction. Wherefore let us learn to submit ourselves to the correcting hand of God, saying, 'It is thy mercy we are not consumed,' Lam. iii. 22; considering that this light affliction is nothing to that we deserve, or that Christ suffered for us, or that the damned suffer in hell, or to that joy we have laid up for us in heaven; and therefore as it is in Micah vii. 9, 'Let us bear the indignation of the Lord, because we have sinned against him.'

Secondly, *Let us justify God.* We have deserved affliction. He hath dealt justly with us: Neh. ix. 31, *seq.*, 'Righteousness belongeth to him, but to us shame and confusion of face,' Dan. ix. 7.

Thirdly, *Let us moderate our censure* of those that are dejected and out of heart, through sense of sin: Prov. xviii. 19, 'A wounded spirit, who can bear?' Impute it not therefore to melancholy, or despair and madness, or as Eli unadvisedly did, to drunkenness, when he reprehended Hannah, 1 Sam. i. 14; for can we think it strange, when God sees sin in his children, that he causes them to see it, and that when they see it they should shew it in their outward gestures? No; it is no light burden, that a man may run away with.

Ver. 4. 'But there is forgiveness with thee.'

This verse contains a blessed appeal. God hath a court of justice, and a tribunal of mercy. If God should examine in justice what we have done, we could not stand: 'but there is mercy or forgiveness with the Lord,' Therefore it is an appeal from the throne of justice to the mercy-seat; and yet this is not so properly an appeal but it admits of limitations. For, first, *appeals are used in aid of those that are innocent.* Now we by nature are all unclean. Again, *appeals are grounded for the most part upon discovery of insufficiency,* or of violent indirect courses in the managing of the cause. This can no ways be attributed to God, who is not rigorous nor insufficient, or swayed by indirect means; for he accepts the person of none. Again, *an appeal is from an inferior court to a higher.* But here it is not so, for we appeal from God to God; from God armed with justice, examining by law, to God a father armed with love, looking upon us in the comfortable promises of the gospel; from Sinai to Sion, from Moses to Christ. And in this appeal, as in others, the former sentence of the law, whereby we are 'cursed,' is utterly disannulled, so as 'no condemnation is to those that are in Christ,' Rom. viii. 1. But this belongs to such (as it is in other appeals) *who must see themselves condemned, before they can have the benefit of this appeal.* There is no flying to mercy unless we find ourselves in need. But to come to some observations. In the first place, we may see by this example *that the soul of a Christian apprehends God according to its estate,* to comfort itself, and therefore beholds him as a forgiving God. And therefore the children of God, when they are at the lowest, they recover themselves with something they find in God's nature and promise,

and to that end have a spirit of faith to trust and rely upon God; and those that have it not, sink lower and lower.

Doct. 1. Here we may observe, that the *Christian soul, once stung with sin, flies to the free mercy of God for ease.* Let a sinner be in Haman's estate, tell him of all pleasures, whatever they be, he cares not; nothing but pardon delights his soul. David, a king, a prophet, a man after God's own heart, Acts xiii. 22, beloved of his people, wonderfully graced, yet being troubled with his sin, could not stand. He respects not his outward privileges, prerogatives, majesty, and the like. No; he is the blessed man to whom God imputes no sin, Ps. xxxii. 1. And this is the reason why so much is attributed still to the *blood of Christ, everywhere, in the Scripture*; because the soul once pricked, finds no ease nor cure but in it principally, yet not excluding the other merits and obedience of Christ. And David, when he would raise up his soul to praise God, describes him to be a God 'forgiving sin and healing infirmities,' Ps. ciii. 3; and therefore we should, when our consciences are burdened, go as Joab did and catch hold on the horns of the altar, to the mercy of God. There live and there die. And though the conflict be never so great, we shall at length find that, as Jacob, we shall be children of *Israel*, and such as shall prevail with God, and that for our depth of misery, he hath a depth also of mercy; and this mercy will appear either in preserving us from sin, before we are fallen into it, or rescuing us from it if once we be fallen into it.

Quest. But how comes it, may some say, that God forgives? Doth he it without satisfactions?

Ans. I answer, No.

Quest. How then is it done, seeing he hath decreed that without blood shall be no remission? Heb. ix. 22.

Ans. I answer, This is done in Christ.

Quest. But why is he not mentioned here, nor in the Old Testament neither?

Ans. I answer, He was laid down to us in the Old Testament, in types and promises; for what other was the paschal lamb but 'the Lamb of God taking away the sins of the world,' by sprinkling our hearts with his blood? He was the priest that, before he could open an entrance into the holy of holies for us, must first shed blood and offer sacrifice. What signified the ark with the law covered within it, the mercy-seat upon it, and over them two cherubins covering one another, but Christ our ark covering the curses of the law, in whom is the ground of all mercy? 'which things the angels desire to pry into,' 1 Pet. i. 12, as into the pattern of God's deep wisdom. And whenas any prayed in the temple they looked towards the mercy-seat, what meaneth it other than that, whenever we do pray to God, we should behold Christ, through whom God appears to be merciful and gracious? What signified the temple, towards which they looked when they prayed, 2 Chron. vi. 38, Dan. vi. 10, but that we in our prayers should evermore have reference to our temple Christ Jesus? And being thus assured, we may safely pass the flaming fire of God's justice. If there were any other to be trusted besides Christ, there would be no peace of conscience. The sinner would argue, I am a creature, my sin is infinite; no creature can satisfy, they are not infinite; angels cannot stand; it must be an infinite majesty that must satisfy, and it must be with blood. Now, Christ by his blood hath obtained eternal redemption for us, and therefore none but Christ, none but Christ! He is God-man, making

God and man at one. It is his nature, and it is his office. So as God is just as well as merciful; for as it is Rom. iii. 24th and 25th verses, 'God the Father hath proposed or set forth Christ' in types and figures 'to be a propitiation,' alluding to the mercy-seat, 'to declare his righteousness and justice, that he may be just in punishing sin,' that is in Christ; 'and a justifier of the sinner that believes in Christ Jesus,' because he accepted of Christ's satisfaction, so as his mercy devised a remedy to satisfy his justice. Thus much in general; now to come to particulars. First, take it exclusively, and we may observe,

Doct. 1. That only God can release a guilty conscience; only he can speak peace to a soul in distress. Ministers indeed have keys to open and shut heaven; but they use them only ministerially, as they find persons disposed, but Christ independently. Now, then, whenas man assumes this prerogative to himself, as the popes were wont to do, giving indulgences, it is no other than to set them in the place of God. 'I, even I, forgive sin,' saith God, Jer. xxxi. 34. None can quiet the conscience but one that is above the conscience, which is God, who is only* the party offended; though there be also an offence against men. *This ought to comfort us, that we have to do with a forgiving God,* Neh. ix. 31. There is none like to him, to whom it is natural to remit and forgive sin. It is his name: Exod. xxxiv. 6, 'Forgiving iniquities, transgressions, and sins,' all manner of sins; sins against knowledge and against conscience; with him is plentiful forgiveness.

Doct. 2. Secondly, Observe that as God only forgives sin, so he ever forgives sin. It is always his nature, as the fire always burns; as he is Jehovah, he is merciful. John i. 29, Christ he is 'the Lamb of God,' that doth take away the sins of the world. It is a perpetual act; as we say the sun doth shine, the spring doth run. He is, Zech. xiii. 1, that 'fountain that is opened for sin and uncleanness.' Mercy is his nature, and forgiveness is an effect of his mercy.

Obj. Therefore it is no satisfying objection that the distressed soul will be ready to make, that God was merciful to David and Peter, but how can he be to me, miserable sinner? For God, as he forgave Peter, Paul, David, so he forgives now. He is a fountain of mercy never drawn dry. He is unchangeable; and therefore we are not consumed, Mal. iii. 6; and Christ is the same 'yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.' The consideration of this should be as a perpetual picture in our hearts.

Doct. 3. Thirdly, Hence we may gather, that God's mercy is free, and from himself. Though in us is sin and iniquity, yet in thee is mercy; and therefore God saith, I do not this for your sakes, but for mine own sake, Ezek. xxxvi. 22. Yet must not this be understood so as if it were freely and only from God the Father, excluding Christ. But therefore it is, in that we shall stand in need of no satisfactory merits of our own. Away therefore with popish doctrines of satisfactions by our own works. The holy man saith not, with thee is justice to take my works as satisfaction for my sin. No; though this holy man were a gracious man, yet mercy is all his plea. And if the question be, how the sinner stands free from punishment and entitled to all good, it is from forgiveness, which is from God's mercy, grounded on Christ's satisfaction. All is laid upon him, Isa. liii. 5. He was wounded for our transgressions; he bore our sorrows; he was made sin for us, that knew no sin, 2 Cor. v. 21. The nature of man will hardly stoop to this divine truth. But the Spirit teacheth us to rely

* That is, 'alone is.'—G.

on the free forgiveness of God in Christ; and therefore Christ and his apostles bid such 'believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.' We may think this an easy lesson. But hereafter, when God shall open our sins and lay them upon our consciences, they will then tell us fearful things. There is no hope! thou must be damned! Against such times lay up grounds of comfort; and let this text be a haven to resort to. It is true, 'if thou markest what is done amiss, who can stand? but there is mercy with thee that thou be feared.'

Doct. 4. Fourthly, We may from hence observe, that *the best Christian and most gracious man alive needs forgiveness of his sins*; for where the conscience is enlightened it will discover what corruption it finds, and so the necessity of being delivered. So 1 John ii. 1, 'If any man sin, we have an advocate;' that is, such as I am, have need of an advocate; and one reason may be, because indeed such see in their sins much more ingratitude than others, for they sin against the knowledge of God's love to their souls in forgiving former sins; and then to fall into sin again, it is as broken bones, Ps. li. 8. And the apostle, 2 Cor. v. 20, speaking to the believing Corinthians, 'I beseech you to be reconciled to God;' for Christ was made sin for us; for you, and for me. Even we sin daily, and stand in need of reconciliation. We must daily pray, 'Forgive us our sins,' yea, the best of the disciples must do it. If we come not with this petition, 'our sins are written with a pen of iron, and with the claw of an adamant,' Job xix. 24.*

Doct. 5. Fifthly, *This mercy and forgiveness is general to all that cast themselves on his free mercy.* It is Satan's subtilty to persuade us at the first, that sin is nothing; but when it is committed and cannot be recalled, then he tells us it is greater than can be pardoned. No. The gospel is the power of God to salvation to all that do believe. Let none despair. It is a greater sin than the former. *Deus non est desperantium pater, sed iudex.* God's pardon is general, to all persons, that repent of all sin, whereby he frees them from all evil. He pardons all persons: Manasses the sorcerer, Cornelius, Zaccheus, persecuting Paul. The parable of the lost sheep, the lost groat, the prodigal son, testifies it. God offers it freely, 'Why will you die, O house of Israel?' Jer. xxvii. 13. He complains when it is neglected: 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how oft would I have gathered you together!' Mat. xxiii. 37. 'He threatens' because men will not hear, and 'he pardons all sins.' There is no disease above the skill of this Physician. He healeth all thy sins and all thy infirmities, Ps. ciii. 1-3. Yea, if it were possible that the sinner against the Holy Ghost could repent, there were hope in Israel concerning this! He hath pardon for sin long lived in. 'At what time soever a sinner repenteth, he will blot out his wickedness,' 2 Chron. xx. 9. What though they be never so enormous? God's thoughts are not as ours, Isa. lv. 8. Conscience may be overcharged with sin. We may play the harlot with many lovers; yet return to me, saith the Lord, Jer. iii. 1. He that bids Peter forgive seventy-seven times,† shall not he have plenteous redemption? What proportion is there between the sin of a creature, and the mercy of an infinite Majesty? He frees from all ill, from all punishment. His forgiveness is perfect. Though we be as red as crimson with sin, he will make us white as snow, Isa. i. 18. He removes our sins from his presence as 'far as the east is from the west,' Ps. ciii. 12.

Quest. But some will say, Why corrects he then his children?

* Cf. A. B. Davidson's 'Commentary' *in loc.*, and also Caryl.—G.

† Rather seventy seven-times; that is, seventy times seven times.—G.

Ans. I answer, not from revenging justice, for he is our Father ; and what he does, it comes from love, and is mingled with love and moderated with love to our strength, and are turned by love to our good. When he follows us with prosperity, he is our alluring Father ; and when he corrects us, he is our correcting, not punishing, Father, Heb. xii. from 3d to the 12th. Yet let not this be sinisterly taken. It is spoken only to the humble heart, that is broken with sin, which is the sixth general observation ; *there must be first sight of sin, then sense of misery, then confession of sin and begging pardon*, or else none is granted. For God bestows pardon so as may be most for his glory and our comfort. What glory can he reap by pardoning those that will sin, ‘ because grace may abound,’ Rom. vi. 1, and so ‘ will turn the grace of God into wantonness ’ ? Jude 4. And what comfort can we have of the pardon of our sins till we see our sins, and feel what it is to want pardon ? Sight of sin and mercy are inseparable. Sometimes the sense of pardon is delayed, to make us hunger after it ; sometimes it follows suddenly after sight of sin, as it did to Matthew and Zaccheus, Mat. xi. 28. But one must go before the other : first, must the wind of the sight of God’s anger come breaking and rending the rocky hard hearts that are within us ; then comes the soft still voice speaking peace to the humble soul. The reasons may be, first, *to set an edge on our prayers for forgiveness*, else who would care for it. Secondly, *to make us highly to esteem forgiveness of sin*. The promises are sweet to the dejected soul, as a pardon is to the condemned person. Thirdly, *that God might have the more glory and thanks*. When we find the bitterness of sin, as it is Jer. ii. 19, to be sweetened by God’s mercy, then ‘ My soul, praise thou the Lord ; and all that is within me, praise his holy name.’ He forgives all my sin, and heals all my infirmities, Ps. ciii. 1, 2, 3. And, lastly, *because our sins unrepented keep good from us, and us from the fountain of all good*, and must be removed before there can be any way for mercy.

This therefore justifies those ministers that in these days of the gospel do enforce the law ; and people must not be offended thereat, but suffer their consciences to be laid open, that the word may come close and home to them ; and secondly, they must use the means, to come to a sense and feeling of their sin. To which end let *us make sin as odious and dangerous in our eyes as we can*. It is odious to God. To us it is poison and leprosy though we cherish it, and hate ministers and friends for touching it. It is abomination to God. It thrusts him out of our hearts, and puts in the devil, God’s arch enemy. It causes us to prefer base pleasure, fading profits, before the favour and mercy and love of God. Must not this needs be hateful to God ? But then how much more intolerable are those sins that bring neither profit nor pleasure, but causes us to thrust out God, even because we will ? But this is not all, for as it is abominable to God, *so it is dangerous to us* ; for whence comes judgments ? Whence is it that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven ? Rom. i. 18. Whence is sickness, disgrace, troubles ? All these are the fruits of sin. Nothing makes us miserable but sin. Take a man when he lies a-dying. Ask him what troubles him ? Oh ! he cries out of sin, of the wrath of God. He feels not sickness, even as the gout is not felt by one that hath a fit of the stone upon him. Let us think of this in time ; let us shame the devil, shame ourselves. But is this all ? No. Judas saw his sin and confessed, yet was he never the better. He wanted that which should make his repentance perfect. He wanted faith to lay hold on pardon. A poor man is fit for treasure, but unless he lay hold on treasure, he shall never be rich.

Therefore faith and repentance are ever joined in the gospel. Repent and believe the gospel, as was said to the jailor. So Christ saith, 'Come to me,' Mat. xi. 28. Christ came to satisfy for all sin, to cure all diseases, but they must first come to him, and say, 'Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean,' Mat. viii. 2; and to such as these I may say, as they said to the blind man, 'Be of comfort, for Christ calls thee,' Mark x. 49.

'That thou mayest be feared.'

Fear in this place is taken for the spiritual worship of God, arising from a reverential fear mingled with love. 'Fear God and keep his commandments,' Eccles. xii. 13, is the whole duty of man. So that these words being considered with the former, brings this observation to our consideration.

Doct. That God's goodness, forgiveness, grace, and mercy, is a means to stir up his children to all duties; and therefore we are commanded to do all things in fear: to 'work out our salvation with fear,' Philip. ii. 12, eat and drink with fear; and in Jude 12, the wicked are branded with this, 'that they eat without fear.' So as whatever we do, we must do it in fear, shewing the reverence of God continually, and jealousy over ourselves, lest we should stop the light of God's countenance from us.

Quest. But it will be said, How is it then said 'that we should serve him without fear,' 1 Cor. xvi. 10, being redeemed from our enemies?

Ans. I answer, There is a twofold fear: one a slavish fear, whereof that place is meant. We should serve him without fear of damnation, of punishment, and of judgment. But the fear that we speak of here is a fear of reverence and love, that stirs us up to worship him.

Quest. But how doth it stir to duty? may some say.

Ans. I answer, first, it *stirs up faith in our hearts.* Hope of forgiveness will cause us to cast ourselves into their arms whom we have offended. Where no hope of mercy is, there follows nothing but fear, causing us to fly away; even as we see proclamation of pardon to rebels causes them to come in, but the contrary makes them run away. Again, *sense of forgiveness works more love.* David's murder, Paul's persecution, Peter's denial, caused abundance of love. Where many sins are forgiven, there will be much love, Luke vii. 47; and where much love is, there will be obedience to all God's commandments, for 'love is the fulfilling of the law,' Rom. xiii. 10. Contrarily, desperation is the ground of all sin. This is the ground of all hate. The devils they hate God. Because they know there is no remedy left for them, therefore they cannot endure the remembrance of him. Contrariwise, as it is Ps. lxxv. 2, 'Unto thee shall all flesh come.' Why? 'For thou hearest prayer.' Again, *fear and forgiveness are joined in the new covenant.* 'I will put my fear in thy heart, and thou shalt not depart from me,' Jer. xxxii. 40; and Christ, to all his, is both king, priest, and prophet. He comes to all by water as well as blood. He is become righteousness, wisdom, and holiness, 1 Cor. i. 30. Again, *a Christian he will, by reason, enforce this on himself,* as Paul did, 2 Cor. v. 15. Christ died for us; therefore must we live to him, and not to ourselves.

Use 1. This therefore should cause us to take heed of all thoughts of despair. Let it be enough that we have broken the law; let us not pull a greater sin on us by denying the gospel, the mercies and truths of God. Let us by any means take heed, for Satan will join with guilty consciences, speaking with cursed Cain, 'My sin is greater than can be pardoned,' Gen. iv. 13. No article of our creed is so much opposed by him, as that of the forgiveness of sin by Christ's merits, which is the very life and soul of a

church. All the former articles of the creed are perfected in this, and all the following articles are effects hereof.

Use 2. Secondly, This doctrine *furnishes an answer to the papists*, who lay scandals* on the doctrine of free justification by the merits of Christ, without our own works; saying that we nourish thereby carelessness in a Christian life, whenas the Scripture, and the Spirit of God in the hearts of those that are truly regenerate, do reason quite contrary. 'There is mercy with thee, that thou mayest be feared;' not that we may live as we list, for whom God forgives, he first truly humbles; whom he washes, he gives hearts to keep themselves clean; so as with the burnt child, they dread the fire ever after. No; it is themselves that overthrow good works, while they ground them on false grounds. For either they do them to satisfy God's wrath, which is slavish, or to merit by them, which is a token of a hireling; and most of their works are such, as if God should ask them, 'Who required them at their hands?' Isa. i. 12, they could never be able to answer. They, while they talk of good works, in the mean time overthrow faith and love, which should be the ground of a good work. What can they do more than a Cain or a Judas, or the wickedest man alive.

Secondly, *We may hence gather a ground of discerning our estate*, whereby we shall know whether God's mercy and forgiveness belong to us or not; for it is impossible, where there is no inward worship of God in the heart, where there is no fear and jealousy of sin, where there is no conscience of swearing, blaspheming, and such abominations, that ever such yet had any true taste of God's mercy and forgiveness. Let them not take comfort by the example of the thief on the cross, that cried for mercy and had it; for there is a time of grace, and there are some sinners, as those that flatter themselves in a course of sin, thinking to repent when they will, against which the wrath of God will smoke, Deut. xxix. 20. Therefore let not such soothe up themselves. Those that have their sins forgiven do fear God. Such fear not God, and therefore their sins are not forgiven. Many shall say in that day, 'Lord, Lord,' to whom Christ will profess, 'he never knew them,' Mat. vii. 23; and therefore let us never assure ourselves of forgiveness, farther than we find in us a hatred of sin. For a man to live in a course of known sin, it stops the current of God's mercy; who will wound the 'hairy scalp of such as despise the patience and long-suffering of God,' Rom. ii. 4. While we have time, therefore, and are young, before lusts settle themselves in us, serve the Lord with fear; deny him not the service due to him. If we do, it is just with God to take us away suddenly, or to deliver us over to an impenetrable hard heart; and when we die, that God should take away from us our senses, or to give over our consciences to such a horror and trembling fear, as shall not suffer us to come so near as to have any hope of mercy, but die in despair. Let us pray, therefore, against a careless heart, and say to him, Lord, thou camest to redeem and set me free from the works of the devil! Lord, deliver me from the power of sin and of my own corruption. For we may assure ourselves, he that never discerned this hatred of sin in him, never asked pardon from his heart; and he that never asks it shall never have it.

Use. Let us in the next place learn thereby *to go the right way, to work assurance of forgiveness*: first, *learn to see our misery*; then, *get persuasion that there is a remedy*; then, *get knowledge thereof*; and then *beg it*. It is a preposterous course that many men take. They will change their ill courses, but without confession or acknowledgment of sin; and therefore they turn

* That is, 'take offence at.'—G.

indeed, but it is from one sin to another: from being dissolute they will become covetous, and so change to the worse; for they change not from right grounds; not from love to God and hatred of sin, but ever from the love of one reigning sin to another. For all such, and all other, that either find* their sin, or think not of it, this Scripture is of excellent use; and we may speak of it as St Paul, 2 Tim. iii. 16, speaks of all the Scripture, 'It is profitable for doctrine,' teaching us what we are by nature since the fall; wherein we may have remedy of our misery; how and in what manner to attain the remedy. It is profitable for 'reproof' of the doctrine of justification by works; and it is profitable for 'correction' of our lives, teaching us to avoid despair, and yet withal to avoid security. It is profitable for 'comfort' to all those that are dejected by sin, by considering the mercy of God in Christ, which is more and greater than sin in us, if we have faith to lay hold on it; so that we may say with St Augustine, *Ego admisi, unde tu damnare potes me, sed non amisisti unde tu salvare potes me.*

Ver. 5. 'I wait for the Lord, yea, my soul waiteth.

These words do shew the estate and disposition of the holy man after his prayer. Though he had formerly sense of mercy and pardon, yet he waits for more full and sweet apprehension thereof. In them we may observe, first, *though God be exceeding gracious, yet there is matter of waiting*, so long as we live here on earth, for he gives not all the fulness of his blessing at once. Though he may give taste of pardon of sin in present, yet not presently deliverance out of danger. 'The light of the righteous shineth more and more unto the perfect day,' Prov. iv. 18. There is no day that is perfected in an instant; and the reasons hereof may be,

Reason 1. First, *To force us to search our souls*, whether we be fit for blessing; whether we be thoroughly humbled, and have thoroughly repented or not. Thus dealt he with Jonas, and thus with the children of Israel for Achan's cause.

Reason 2. Secondly, It may be a means *to stir us up to more earnestness in seeking*: to make us like the woman of Canaan, more earnest the more she was repelled.

Reason 3. Thirdly, He gives us occasion of waiting, *to shew the truth and soundness of his graces in us*; otherwise should we have no means to try how the grace in us would serve us in time of need.

Reason 4. Fourthly, Hereby God doth *endear those favours that we want, that it may come the more welcome to us, and we be the more thankful for it*. Thus God dealt with this holy man; and thus doth he with his church. For while we live here we are always children of hope; not miserable, because we have a sweet taste of what we hope for, and not perfectly happy, because we want fulness. Before Christ they hoped for his coming in the flesh; since Christ, we look for his 'second coming in glory'; in grace we look for glory; and when our souls are in glory, they look for the redemption of the bodies, and for the day of restoring of all things. 'How long, Lord, how long?' Rev. vi. 10. Else would this life be heaven to us; and we should not desire or pray, 'Lord, let thy kingdom come.'

Use. And for use, *This should whet in us our desires and prayers for our heavenly estate*; and not make our heaven here on earth, but desire earnestly the full harvest, by considering how excellent the first-fruits of glory in this life are; and with the creature, Rom. viii. 19, 'wait, and expect,

* Qu. 'hide'?—Ed.

and long, and groan for the time of the dissolution of all things ;' and make this a note *to discern of our estate* ; for it is a certain infallible token of a good frame of spirit in us, if we can long for that better life in the fulness, that we have here ; that we can desire to be with Christ. Furthermore, note this *as a difference between the estates of the wicked and the godly*. The wicked must look for worse and worse continually. His best is here, and while he hath this world ; but the godly, their worst is here, their best is to come.