

# THE SUCCESSFUL SEEKER.

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### NOTE.

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### \* THE SVCCESSEFVLL SEEKER.

In tvvo Sermons, on

PSALME 27. 8.

BY

*The late Learned and Reverend Divine,*

RICH. SIBBS.

Doctor in Divinity, Mr. of KATHERINE Hall

in *Cambridge*, and sometimes Preacher

to the Honourable Society of

GRAYES-INNE.

1 CHRON. 16. 11.

*Seeke yee the Lord, and his strength : seeke his face  
continually.*

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*When thou saidst, Seek ye my face ; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.—Ps. XXVII. 8.*

In the former verse, David begins a prayer to God, ‘Hear, O Lord ; have mercy upon me, and answer me.’ This verse is a ground of that prayer, ‘Seek ye my face,’ saith God. The heart answers again, ‘Thy face, Lord, will I seek ;’ therefore I am encouraged to pray to thee. In the words are contained,

God’s command and David’s obedience.

‘Seek my face ; thy face, Lord, will I seek.’ God’s warrant and David’s work answerable, the voice and the echo : the voice, ‘Seek my face ;’ the rebound back again of a gracious heart, ‘Thy face, Lord, will I seek.’

‘When thou saidst.’ It is not in the original. It only makes way to the sense. Passionate speeches are usually abrupt : ‘Seek my face ;’ ‘thy face, Lord, will I seek.’ The first thing that I will observe from the encouragement is, that,

*Obs. God shews himself to his understanding creature.*

God begins you see, ‘Seek my face.’ He must open his meaning and shew himself first. God comes out of that hidden light that he dwells in, and discovers himself and his will to his creature, especially in the word. It is our happiness now, that we know the mind and meaning of God.

What is the ground of this ? What need God stoop thus ?

There is the same ground for it as that there is a God. These things go in an undivided knot, God : the reasonable, understanding creature ; and religion, that ties that creature to God ; a discovery of\* God what that religion shall be.

For in the intercourse between God and man, man can do nothing except he hath his warrant from God. It is extreme arrogance for man to devise a worship of God. Do we think that God will suffer the creature to serve him as he pleaseth ? No. That were to make the creature, which is the servant, to be the master. It belongs to the master or lord to appoint the service. What master or lord will be served according to the liberty and wisdom and will of his servant ? And shall the great God of heaven and earth be worshipped and depended upon as man pleaseth, or from any encouragement from himself ? Shall not he design his own worship ? He that singles out his own work makes himself master in that.

\* That is, = ‘by God.’—G.

Therefore God begins with this command, 'Seek my face;' and then the heart answereth, 'Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' God must first discover his mind, of necessity, to the creature.

Scriptures might be forced hence to shew the duty owing from the creature, man, to God. For the creature must have a ground for what he doth. It must not be will-worship, *infringit*, &c. It is a rule, it weakens the respect of obedience that is done without a cause. Though a man doth a good deed, yet what reason, what ground have ye for this? And that we may do things upon ground, God must discover himself; therefore he saith, 'Seek my face.'

It may be objected that everything proclaims this, to seek God. Though God had not spoken, nor his word, every creature hath a voice to say, 'Seek God.' All his benefits have that voice to say, 'Seek God.' Whence have we them? If the creature could speak, it would say, I serve thy turn that thou mayest serve God, that made thee and me. As the prophet saith, the rod and chastisement hath a voice. 'Hear the rod, and him that smiteth,' Micah vi. 9. Everything hath a voice. We know God's nature somewhat in the creature, that he is a powerful, a wise, a just God. We see it by the works of creation and providence; but if we should know his nature, and not his will towards us—his commanding will, what he will have us do; and his promising will, what he will do for us—except we have a ground for this from God, the knowledge of his nature is but a confused knowledge; it serves but to make us inexcusable, as in Rom. i. 19, *seq.*, it is proved at large. It is too confused to be the ground of obedience, unless the will of God be discovered before; therefore we must know the mind of God.

And that is the excellency of the church of God above all other people and companies of men, that we have the mind and will of God; what he requires of us by way of duty to him, and what he will do to us as a liberal and rich God. These two things, which are the main, are discovered; what we look for from God, and the duty we owe back again to God, these are distinctly opened in the word. You see here God begins with David, 'Seek ye my face.'

Indeed, God is a God of order. In this subordination of God and the creature, it is fit that God should begin. It is God's part to command, and ours to obey. This point might be enlarged, but it is a point that doth but make way to that that follows, therefore I will not dwell upon it.

Again, in this first part, God's command or warrant, 'Seek ye my face,' you see here,

*Obs. 2. God is willing to be known.* He is willing to open and discover himself; God delights not to hide himself. God stands not upon state, as some emperors do that think their presence diminisheth respect. God is no such God, but he may be searched into. Man, if any weakness be discovered, we can soon search into the depth of his excellency; but with God it is clean otherwise. The more we know of him, the more we shall admire him. None admire him more than the blessed angels, that see most of him, and the blessed spirits that have communion with him. Therefore he hides not himself, nay, he desires to be known; and all those that have his Spirit desire to make him known. Those that suppress the knowledge of God in his will, what he performs for men and what he requires of them, they are enemies to God and of God's people. They suppress the opening of God, clean contrary to God's meaning: 'Seek my face;' I desire to be made known, and lay open myself to you.

Therefore we may observe by the way, that when we are in any dark condition, that a Christian finds not the beams of God shining on him, let him not lay the blame upon God, as if God were a God that delighted to hide himself. Oh no; it is not his delight. He loves not strangeness to his poor creature. It is not a point of his policy. He is too great to affect \* such poor things. No; the fault is altogether in us. We walk not worthy of such a presence; we want humility and preparation. If there be any darkness in the creature, that he finds God doth not so shine on him as in former times, undoubtedly the cause is in himself; for God saith, 'Seek my face.' He desires to open himself. But it is a point that I will not be large in.

We see hence likewise, that

*Obs. 3. God's goodness is a communicative, spreading goodness.*

That is peculiar to God and to those that are led with the Spirit of God, that are like him; they have a communicative, diffusive goodness that loves to spread itself. 'Seek ye my face.' I am good in myself, but I desire to shine on you, to impart my goodness to you.

If God had not a communicative, spreading goodness, he would never have created the world. The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost were happy in themselves, and enjoyed one another before the world was. But that God delights to communicate and spread his goodness, there had never been a creation nor a redemption. God useth his creatures, not for defect of power, that he can do nothing without them, but for the spreading of his goodness; and thereupon comes all the subordination of one creature to another, and all to him.

Oh that we had hearts to make way for such a goodness as God would cast into us, if we were as we should be. God's goodness is a spreading, imparting goodness. It is a common distinction. There is the goodness of the fountain and the goodness of the vessel, that is our goodness, because we contain somewhat in us that is good. The goodness of the creature, that is but the channel or the cistern; but the goodness of God is another manner of goodness, the goodness of the fountain. The fountain begs not from the river; the sun borrows not light from the candle; God begs not goodness from the creature. Ours is a borrowed goodness, but his is a communicative goodness: 'Seek my face,' that I may impart my goodness. The sun delights to spread his beams and his influence in inferior things, to make all things fruitful. Such a goodness is in God as is in a fountain, or in the breast that loves to ease itself of milk.

I note it, that we may conceive aright of God, that is more willing to bestow good than we are to ask it. He is so willing to bestow it, that he becomes a suitor to us, 'Seek ye my face.' He seeks to us to seek him. It is strange that heaven should seek to earth, and yet so it is.

*Quest.* Whence comes this in God, the attribute of goodness, the spreading goodness in his nature, that he desires to impart and communicate himself?

*Ans.* There is no envy in God. He hath none above him, and therefore he labours to make all good. There is a mystery in it; but if some be not good, the fault is in themselves. As it is a prerogative in him to make some more and some less good, so there is a fault in them; that I am no better, it is my own fault. The prerogative belongs to God. We must not search into that. But every man may say, I might have been better and more enlarged; I did not seek his face, that he might take occasion to

\* That is, 'choose' = love.—G.

enlarge himself towards me. Would we be like our heavenly Father? Let us labour to have large affections, to have a spreading goodness.

Two things make us very like God, that much concern this point: to do things freely of ourselves, and to do them far. To communicate goodness, and to communicate it far to many. The greater the fire is, the further it burns; the greater the love is, the further it extends and communicates itself. There are none more like God than those that communicate what good they have to others, and communicate it as far and remote as they can to extend it to many. Our Saviour Christ, you see what a world were beholding to him; heaven and earth were beholding to him. And the nearer a man comes to Christ, the more there is a kind of self-denial, to do good to others. Saint Paul had a great measure of Christ in him. He was content to be bestowed for the good of the church; the care of all did lie upon him, 2 Cor. xi. 28. A public mind is God's mind; a public mind is a mind that loves to do good freely and largely to others. Therefore God saith, 'Seek my face,' that I may have better opportunity to empty my goodness to you. 'Seek my face;' that is, seek my presence. The face is the glass of the soul, wherein we see the mind of a man. 'Seek my face;' that is, seek my mind, seek my presence, as we shall see afterward. I will speak no more of that point, God's warrant or command, but go on.

'My heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.'

Here is the work and obedience, 'My heart said unto thee,' &c. David's heart was set in a good and sanctified frame by God; it was between God and his obedience. The heart is between God and our obedience, as it were an ambassador. It understands from God what God would have done, and then it lays a command upon the whole man. The heart and conscience of man is partly divine, partly human. It hath some divinity in it, especially if the man be a holy man. God speaks, and the heart speaks. God speaks to the heart, and the heart speaks to us. And oftentimes when we hear conscience speaking to us, we neglect it; and as St Augustine said of himself, 'God spake often to me, and I was ignorant of it' (a). When there is no command in the word that the heart directly thinks of (as indeed many profane careless men scarce have a Bible in their houses), God speaks to them thus; conscience speaks to them some broken command, that they learn against their wills. They heed it not, but David did not so. God said, 'Seek ye my face;' his heart answers, 'Thy face, Lord, will I seek.'

The heart looks upward to God, and then to itself. 'My heart said.' It said to thee, and then to itself. First, his heart said to God, Lord, I have encouragement from thee. Thou hast commanded that I should seek thy face. So his heart looked to God, and then it speaks to itself, 'Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' It looks first to God, and then to all things that come from itself.

'My heart said.' It said of that point, concerning the thing thou saidst, 'Seek my face.'

'My heart said to thee.' David saw God in all his commandments: 'Thou saidst to me, Seek my face; my heart said to thee.' I know the command is from thee; I have to deal with thee in the command and encouragement, and in the warrant. I look not to the words, but to thee; the authority and strength of them comes from thee.

'My heart said to thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.'

Between the answer of David and God's command and warrant, the heart comes to think seriously upon the command, and then to enjoin the

duty. This is to be considered, because there is no knitting of these two together but by the heart, the serious consideration of the heart. When God saith, 'Seek my face,' he answers, 'I will seek thy face.' How comes this return? The soul considers the ground of the return before the return. A man, when he doth anything, he doth it from the principles of a man. A holy man, when he doth a thing, he doth it from the principle of a holy man; and what is the principles and foundation of the practice of a holy man? A sanctified understanding to tell him what God hath said, and what he hath promised, and wherein God hath discovered himself.

Well, when the heart knows that once, the heart hath enough from heavenward, it hath enough from heaven. God hath said and promised it. Then the heart, by a work it hath of itself, speaks to itself, and to the whole man, to seek God. The heart will not stoop without reason, the heart of an understanding man; but when it sees the command first, 'Seek my face,' then it answers, 'Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' So that this command of God, and this encouragement and warrant from God, 'Seek ye my face,' it was in David's heart, it was written, and set, and grafted in his heart; and then his heart being awed with the command of God, God hath said thus, the heart goes again to God; thou hast said thus, Lord, 'thy face will I seek.'

See the depth of David's speech, when he saith, 'Lord, thy face will I seek.' It came from his heart root, not only from the heart, but from the heart, grounded upon the command and encouragement of God. 'Seek my face.' There is the ground; the heart digesting this thoroughly, this is God's command; I understand it, and understand it from God; I see the authority from whence it comes. Therefore I will stir up myself, 'Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' I shall have occasion to speak somewhat of it afterwards, in the next thing, his obedience. Therefore I go on.

'Thy face, Jehovah, will I seek.'

Here is his return again to God, that he will seek the face of God. I will seek thy face in all my necessities. Then will I seek to thee; and in all thine ordinances I will seek to thee, whereinsoever thy presence is discovered. Thy presence is in all places, especially in thine ordinances; thy presence is in all times, especially in the time of trouble and need. In all times of need I will seek to thee; in all exigences I will seek unto thee; and in all thine ordinances wherein I may find thee. I know I may meet with thee there; thou givest thy people meetings in thine ordinances. It is thy walk; therefore thy face, Lord, will I seek, where I may be sure to meet thee, in thine own way and ordinances. So much for the meaning.

'Thy face, Lord, will I seek.'

Here is, first of all, an application, and obedience from application. They be words of particular application. 'Thy face will I seek.' God had given him a ground, 'Seek ye my face.' His heart makes the application, 'Thy face I will seek,' applying the general encouragement to himself in particular. So that you may observe hence that,

*Obs. The ground of all obedience, of all holy intercourse with God, is a spirit of application.*

Applying the truths of God, though generally spoken, to ourselves in particular. It is spoken here in the plural number, 'Seek ye my face;' but the general implies the particular, as London is in England. 'Seek ye my face,' all ye that are the people of God. But I am one of them: what though I be not named? That tenet in popery is against sense. When a man is condemned by the law, is his name in the law? It is against

such a fact; he is a malefactor: and so the particular is included in the general, 'Seek ye my face.' David knew that; reason taught him that, and not religion.

1. Now the ground of application of divine truths to ourselves in particular is this, *that the truth of God* (setting aside some circumstantial things that arise sometimes to particular persons, that sometimes limit the command to one person, or the promise to one person, cut off those distinctions), *all comfortable truths agree to God's people in all ages, while there is a church in the world.* All truths are eternal truths, die not as men do. David is dead, and Moses is dead; but this truth is not dead, 'Seek ye my face.' Paul is gone, and Peter is gone. We are the Davids and the Moseses, and the Peters, and the Pauls now. Those truths that were good to them are good to us. Whatsoever was written before was written for our comfort, Rom. xv. 4. There is an eternal truth, that runs through all ages of the church, that hath an everlasting comfort. God hath framed the Scriptures not to be limited to the times wherein they were written, as the papists idly speak, Bellarmine and others (b); as if they were occasional things; that the Scriptures were written by such and such men, and concerning only those times. But the Scriptures were written for all times, and it concerns all times to apply all truths to themselves, setting aside those circumstances that are applied to particular men, which are easy to discern. In Heb. xiii. 5 that that was said to Joshua, Josh. i. 5, the apostle applies it to the church in his time, and to all: 'Be not afraid; I will not fail thee nor forsake thee.' It is a general truth. 'And Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness,' that whosoever believes as Abraham is a son of Abraham, Rom. iv. 5. These truths are universal, and concern every one, as well as any. And so many other places of Scripture. 'The promise of the blessed seed,' the believing of it runs from the beginning of the world, in all ages to the coming of Christ. All other promises were but an enlargement of that, that was the mother promise. That is the ground of application, that the general truths agree to all the churches. The truth of God is the portion of every child of God. He may claim every promise, and ought to follow the direction of every command.

The reason is, because all the church of God are heirs alike—heirs of the promise, children of Abraham, heirs of salvation. They have interest in Christ alike, 'in whom all the promises are yea and amen;' in whom all the promises have their making and their performance. And by reason that there is an indifferent equality, in regard of the main things, of all the children of God, they have interest alike in all the benefits by Christ: in all truths, in all substantial duties to God, and all favours from God. That is the ground of the equity of application.

2. But if you will have the ground of the necessity of it, nature will shew that. For the truths are food. If food be not taken, what good doth it do without application? The word of God is a sword: what will a sword do if it hangs up in a man's chamber? or if it be not used when the enemy approacheth? The application of the sword of the Spirit gives the virtue to it. It is to no purpose else. Divine truths are physic. If it be not applied, what use is there of physic?

There is a necessity, if we will obey God, of a spirit of application. There is nothing that will do good but by application, neither in nature nor in grace. There must be a virtual\* application at least. The heavens

\* That is, = in efficacy, energy.—G.



work upon the earth. There is no application bodily, the heavens are too high. But there is a virtual application ; there comes light in, and influence to these inferior bodies. Therefore we say the sun is in the house, and in the place we are in, though there be only his influence there. But there must be application of divine truth to the soul. It must be brought near the soul before the soul can move. There is a necessity of application from a principle of nature to make it our own.

Now as in nature there is a power in the soul to work out of the food that that is good for every member, which we call a digestive power and faculty, that applies and assimilates the meat and nourishment we take to every part ; there be *fibræ*, sucking veins, that suck out of the meat strength for this and that purpose ; so there is in the soul of every Christian and holy man : there is a spiritual sucking ; there is a drawing digestive spirit, that digests and draws out nourishment out of the book of God, that is fit for him ; that he can say, This is mine, this is for me. I want comfort and strength and direction, here it is. I want light, here it is. I am weak, here is supply for it. So there is a digestive power by the Spirit of God in every Christian, to suck and to draw out of the word that that is fit for all purposes and turns ; and he can apply the word upon every occasion : as, if it be a command, he obeys it ; if it be a threatening, he trembles at it ; if it be comfort, he rests in it ; if it be a direction, he follows it likewise. He applies it answerable to the nature of the word, whatsoever it is. His heart is moulded answerable to the word, by reason of the Spirit of application.

3. As there is a ground of the application of the word, and a necessity of it, *so there is a principle of application* ; that is, the Spirit of God in the hearts of the children of God, teaching their spirits to draw wholesome truths fitting to themselves ; and none but the children of God can do it, that have the Spirit of God. They cannot apply the word of God aright. False application of the word of God is the cause of all mischief sometimes, when those that apply the law should apply the gospel ; and on the contrary, when those that should apply the law, sinful, secure persons, apply the gospel. Many times poor distressed persons, that comfort belongs to—‘ Oh comfort my people,’ Isa. xl. 1—they apply the law that belongs not to them. In that case false application is the ground of mischief. Therefore the Spirit of God is the principle of application of divine truths, according to the exigence and estate of God’s people.

*Use.* Therefore we should be stirred up to beg the spirit of application, to maintain our communion and intercourse with God, that we may apply every thing duly and truly to ourselves and our own souls. All is to no purpose else, if we do not apply it, if it be not brought home to our souls and digested thoroughly in our hearts. We must say, This is from God, and this belongs to me ; when we hear truths unfolded, to say of ourselves, This concerns me, and say not, This is a good portion and a good truth for such a one and such a one, but, Every one take out his own portion, this is for me. God saith, ‘ Seek my face ; thy face, Lord, will I seek,’ with a spirit of application.

If we do not—as indeed it is the fault of the times to hear the word of God loosely—we care not so much to hear the word of God, as to hear the gifts of men. We desire to hear fine things, to increase notions. We delight in them, and to hear some empty creature, to fasten upon a story or some phrases by the by. Alas ! you come here to hear duties and comforts, if you be good, and sentences against you, if you be naughty. We

speak God's threatenings to you that will wound you to hell, except you pull them out by repentance. It is another manner of matter to hear than it is took for. 'Take heed how you hear,' saith Christ, Luke viii. 18. So we had need, for the word that we hear now shall judge us at the latter day. Thereupon we should labour for a spirit of application, to make a right use of it as we should.

Therefore those humble souls that are cast down in the sight and sense of their sins, they must apply the sweet and blessed comforts of the gospel, such as are contrite in spirit: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness. Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden,' &c., Mat. xi. 28. Those on the other side, that go on in a course of sin, and will not be reclaimed, let them consider what Moses saith, Deut. xxix. 20, 'If a man go on and bless himself, my wrath shall smoke against such a man, and burn to hell.' I will not remove my wrath from him, till by little and little I take my good Spirit from him, and let him go with some temporal comforts, and then bring him to hell. 'I will curse him in his blessings.' He shall have blessings, but he shall be cursed in all that he doth; and all things shall be in wrath and anger that shall burn to hell. Such like places, let such men apply to themselves. There is no comfort at all to men that live in sin wittingly and willingly. 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear my prayer,' Ps. lxi. 18. If a man despise the ordinance of God, hearing and good means, 'his prayer shall be abominable:' 'He that will not hear the law, his prayer is abominable,' Prov. xxviii. 9. The applying of these things would make men bethink themselves, and turn to God, when he considers what part of the word belongs to him, and makes a right application.

If we make not a right application of God's truths, this mischief will come of it.

(1.) *We dishonour God and his bounty.* Hath God been so bountiful, as to give us so many instructions and such promises? and shall not we make them our own? What is the end of the ministry but to spread before us the unsearchable riches of Christ? They are yours, if you will take them. When you have not a spirit of application, and are not in case to take them, they are lost: God's bounty is discredited.

(2.) *The devil rejoiceth when he seeth what excellent things are laid open in the church of God, in the ministry, what sweet promises and comforts, but here is nobody to take them and lay hold on them;* like a table that is richly furnished, and there is nobody comes and takes it. It makes the devil sport, it rejoiceth the enemy of mankind when we lose so great advantage, that we will not apply those blessed truths and make them our own. There is no greater delight to Satan, than for us to refuse those dainties that God hath provided for us. What can rejoice an enemy more, than to see courtesies refused? He sees that all the Scripture is for comfort to poor distressed souls; and when they refuse their comforts and set light by them, as they tell Job, 'Settest thou light by the consolations of the Almighty?' Job. xv. 11, then Satan, the enemy of mankind, and especially the enemy of our comfort, since he hath lost all comfort and all hope of it himself, he rejoiceth to see us in this condition comfortless. Therefore let us lay claim to the promises by a spirit of application.

(3.) Again, *We are injurious to ourselves, we rob our own souls.* The want of this makes Christians be discouraged and droop as they do. When they are cast down, all comfortable truths belong to them, yet they put them off: This is not for me and those in my case. When God saith he will

come and dwell with a humble heart, This is not for me. This spirit of peevishness and forwardness\* is that that keeps them long from that comfort that they might enjoy. What! to be in the midst of comforts and to starve; for a man to be at a feast and to starve, because he hath not a spirit to digest and to take that that is fit for him!

We detest, and deservedly, those misers that, in the midst of all their abundance, will not spend sixpence upon themselves. What a spirit of baseness is this, in the midst of spiritual contentments and refreshings, when God offers to feed our souls with the fat things of his house, to say, Oh no! this belongs not to me; and cherish a peevish froward spirit that puts all away. Why do we not labour to be in such a condition that we may be cherished? and that we may have satisfaction? to be truly hungry and poor in spirit, that we may be filled and satisfied, and not to go on thus stubbornly? There is a proud kind of modesty. Oh, this belongs not to me; I am unworthy. If we will hearken to our own misgiving hearts in the time of temptation, we shall never answer God and say, 'Lord, thy face will I seek.' Therefore let us labour for a spirit of supplication.† I will not enforce that point further.

Now from this spirit of application, from this general 'Seek ye my face,' comes obedience; for it is a speech of obedience.

'Thy face, Lord, will I seek.'

I will seek *by thy strength and grace*; for when God utters a general command to his children, there goes with that command a secret virtue, whereby they are enabled to seek him. There came a hidden virtue with this 'Seek my face,' when David's spirit was raised by God to think of it. Together with the thought of this 'Seek my face,' there was a virtue enabling his soul to return back to God, to say, 'Lord, thy face will I seek.' So though David said, 'I will seek thy face,' yet there was a spiritual virtue that enabled him. God must find us before we can seek him. He must not only give the command to seek his face, but together with the command, there goes a work of the Spirit to the children of God, that enableth them to seek him.

In the covenant of grace, God doth his part and ours too. Our part is to seek God, to please him and walk before him. They are all one; I need not be curious in particulars. Now this was not a speech of self-confidence, but a speech of the Spirit of God, that went with the command to him.

This is a great encouragement, by the way, to hear good things, and to come to the congregation. We hear many great things, high duties, but we are not able to perform them. It is true, but the gospel is the ministry of the Spirit; and together with the duty there goes the Spirit to enable us to the duty. 'Stand up and walk,' saith Peter to the poor lame man, and there went an enabling virtue to raise him, Acts iii. 6. 'Arise,' saith Christ to Lazarus, and there went a divine virtue to make him rise, John xi. 43; and here, 'Seek my face,' there went a divine virtue to make him seek, which those that condemn the ordinances of God want, because they will not attend upon the ordinances. So much for that.

Now I come to his obedience.

'Thy face, Lord, will I seek.'

This obedience ariseth from application, and his obedience hath these qualifications:

1. *It was present.* As soon as he heard God's will, as soon as his heart did think of the word, he puts not off. The Spirit of God and the works

\* Qu. 'frowardness'?—Ed.

† Qu. 'application'?—Ed.

of it, are not slow in the children of God ; but when they hear their duty, there is a spirit presently, 'Thy face will I seek,' before the heart grow cold again.

2. Again, This return and answer, as it was present, so likewise *it was a pliable obedience* : 'Thy face will I seek.' It is a speech of a ready, cheerful, pliable heart. Where the Spirit of God works, it makes not only present and quick, but cheerful and pliable. For the Spirit of God is like fire, that softens the hardness of the heart, that naturally is like iron, and makes it pliable. God's people are a voluntary people, as it is Ps. cx. 3 ; a people of devotion, of readiness of will, and cheerfulness ; a free-hearted people, a people set at large. They are led with a royal spirit, a spirit above their own ; and that makes that easy and pleasant to them, that otherwise is difficult and impossible to nature.

When Isaiah's lips were touched with a coal from the altar—that is, he had somewhat from the Spirit of God to encourage nature—then 'Here I am, Lord ; send me,' Isa. vi. 8. He detracted\* the business before, and put it off as much as he could. The Spirit of God makes pliable, as we see in the Acts. They cared not for suffering whips or anything, because they were made pliable to God's service ; they accounted it an honour to suffer anything for God's sake, Acts v. 41. The obedience that is good is pliable and cheerful.

God would have things in the church done by such people. The very building of the tabernacle was done by such voluntary people, that brought in as God moved their hearts. Oh, beloved, a Christian knows what it is to have a royal spirit, a free spirit. David knew it. When he had lost it by his sin, he prayed that he might have a free spirit, a cheerful spirit, in the service of God, and in his particular calling, for sin darkens and straitens the soul. 'Thy face will I seek.' His heart was weary and pliable now, as God would have it.

So should our hearts be ; and they will be so, if we have the Spirit of God, ready and cheerful. God hath none to fight his battles against Satan and the kingdom of darkness, but voluntaries. All God's people are voluntaries. They are not pressed soldiers ; I mean, not against their wills, in that sense. Indeed, they have press-money in baptism, to fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil ; but they are not pressed, they are voluntaries. They know they serve a good general, that will pay them abundantly ; therefore they labour to be voluntary. It is a good saying, There is no virtue in men that do things against their wills ; for that is virtue and grace that comes from a man from his own principles, from cheerfulness : 'God loveth a cheerful giver.' I might enlarge this, but I do but take it as it may strengthen the point. Our obedience to God, it must be pliable, and cheerful, and voluntary.

3. Again, Obedience, if it be true, *it is perfect and sincere*, looking to God : 'Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' We must eye God in it, and God's commandment, and not have a double eye. We must not look to our own selves. It must be perfect obedience ; that is, opposite to that which is hypocritical. That is the best perfection. For the perfection of degrees is not to be attained here, but this perfection of soundness is to be laboured for ; as we see here it was a sound obedience : 'Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' I will not seek thy favours and blessings so much as thy face. It was perfect obedience, as perfection is opposed to unsoundness.

4. It was likewise a *professed obedience before all the world, in spite of*

\* That is, 'drew back from,' = delayed.—G.

*Satan* : 'Thy face will I seek.' Let the devil and the world do what they can ; let others do as they will ; but as Joshua saith, 'If you will worship other gods,' if you will fall away, do ; 'but I and my house will serve the Lord.' What if his house will not serve the Lord ? If my house will not serve the Lord, I will. So we should all be of Joshua's mind, 'I and my house will serve the Lord,' Josh. xxiv. 15, let the world go which way it will. In blessed St Paul's time, Oh, saith he, 'There are many of whom I have told you often, and now tell you weeping, who are enemies to the cross of Christ, whose end is damnation, who mind earthly things,' Philip. iii. 18. What doth Paul in the mean time ? Oh, but 'our conversation is in heaven.' We swim a contrary way. We care not to let the world know it. Our conversation is another way. So our obedience must not only be present, and pliable, and perfect, but a professed obedience : that is, to break through all the oppositions of the devil and the world ; with an invincible resolution to break through all difficulties, and scandals, and examples of great persons, and of this and that, if we will go to God, and say truly, 'Lord, thy face will I seek.' Let other men seek what they will : let them seek the face and favour of others ; 'Thy face will I seek.' Thou shalt be instead of all to me, as indeed he is.

5. Again, As it is a professed, so it is a continued, a *perpetual obedience*. He is resolved for the time to come. 'Thy face will I seek : ' not only now, and then turn my back upon thee afterwards ; but I will seek thy face, till I see thee in heaven. I see thy face in thine ordinances, in the word, in thy people ; where two or three be gathered, thou art among them, Mat. xviii. 20. I will see thy face as I may, till I see it in heaven. So here is a perpetual resolution : 'Thy face I will seek.'

6. Lastly, There is one thing more in this *obedience and answer to God's command*, that his answer to God is an answerable answer ; that is, the answer and obedience is suitable to the command. God's command was, 'Seek my face.' His answer is, 'Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' So the point is, that

*Obs. Our obedience to God must be proportionable to that that is commanded.*

It must not be this or that devised by men. When the Lord's eye is on you in this place, and gives you a charge to do thus, the obedience must be suitable. When he saith, 'Seek my face,' we must obey : 'Thy face, Lord, will we seek.' Therefore it may, in some poor sense, be compared to an echo. We return obedience in the same kind. The Spirit of God teacheth the children of God to do so, to answer God in all the things he doth. I know not a better evidence of a child of God, than this answering spirit. How shall I know that God loves me ? I love him again ; therefore I know he hath loved me first. It is an undoubted argument. How shall I know that God hath chosen me ? I choose him : 'Whom have I in heaven but thee ? and what is there in earth in comparison of thee ?' Ps. lxxiii. 25. It is an undoubted argument : Shall I be able to single out God, to be instead of all to me ? and hath not he chosen me first ? Can there be anything in the current, that is not in the spring before ? It is impossible. I know God ; I look on him as my father : certainly he hath shined on me first. I have said to him, 'Thou art my God ;' certainly he hath said before, 'Thou art my servant.' If I say to him, 'Thou art my God,' certainly he hath said before, 'I am thy salvation.' He hath begun. For this is the order : God begins. He saith, 'Seek my face ;' then if we have grace to return answerable obedience to God, 'Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' When thou biddest me, Lord, I will love thee, I will

choose thee, and delight in thee ; thou shalt be my God. If we have this returning spirit back again, we cannot have a better argument that God loves us, than by answering God's course.

This is that that St Peter hath in 1 Peter iii. 21. That that doth all in baptism, it is not 'the washing of the filth of the body,' but the *ἑπερώτημα*, 'the answer,' or the demand 'of a good conscience ;' but 'answer' is better. The answer of a good conscience cleanseth in baptism. What is that ?

In baptism, dost thou believe, saith the minister, in God the Father Almighty ? I do believe. That was the answer. Dost thou believe in God the Son ? I do believe. Dost thou believe the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting ? I do believe. Dost thou renounce the devil and his works ? I renounce them. That is the answer of a good conscience. Where that is from the heart, there God hath spoken to that heart before, and there is obedience to purpose. 'Thy face will I seek.' It is that that brings comfort, not the washing of the water. It is not the eating of the bread, and drinking the wine, and hearing the word of God : when there is not the answer of a good conscience, when we say we believe, and we will do this, to do it indeed, Lord, 'I will believe ;' I will go out of the church with a purpose to practise what I hear. Here is the answer of a good conscience, when we mingle what we hear with faith, and labour to practise it, or else it will do no good.

Our obedience must be suitable and answerable, as I said before : if it be a direction, to follow it ; if it be a command, to obey it ; if it be a threatening, to fear it ; if it be a comfort, a promise, to rest upon it. Let there be a suitableness of obedience to the word thereafter as the word is. Let us have a spiritual desire to these things, to imitate the holy man of God, as we desire to share in his comforts.

I will follow this point of the answerableness of obedience a little further, and then come to the particular of seeking.

Let our obedience be every way answerable first. Let the heart think what God saith, what God commands and promiseth ; let the heart take the word of God the second time and ruminate on it, and go over it again. Let us look into the word, and see what is commanded, and what is promised, and then let the heart go over it again. And then upon that allege it to God.

(1.) *Put case a man be in trouble*, Lord, thou hast commanded, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will hear thee,' Ps. l. 15. Let the heart think of it and go over that encouragement. It is rather an encouragement than a command. Though indeed God lay a command on us to be good to our own souls, it is a duty to love ourselves. Therefore he commands us to go to him, to seek his face, as though we wronged him by disobedience, when we injure ourselves by our peevishness, as indeed we do. God loves us better than we love ourselves. Let us think of the command and invitation ; thou hast commanded me, Lord, and encouraged me to come ; I am now in trouble, experience teacheth me. I come to thee. Thou hast said, 'He that sitteth in darkness, and seeth no light, let him trust in the name of the Lord,' Isa. l. 10. I am in darkness, and see no light now, I trust in thy name. Let the heart think of the promise, and then allege it to God, and come with an obedient answer, and cast itself upon him, and trust in him.

(2.) *We are in want, perhaps*, and see no issue, no supply. Think of God's gracious promise, 'I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee,' Heb. xiii. 5. I come to thee and claim this promise ; I am in covenant with thee, &c.

(3.) *So we should take the promise.* Thou hast said, 'At what time soever a sinner comes to thee with a repentant heart, thou wilt forgive his iniquities; and though his sins were as scarlet, thou wilt make them as snow, and white as wool,' Isa. i. 18. My soul thinks of that command, and I come to thee.

Thou hast bid all that are weary and heavy laden in soul, that are troubled in conscience with the sense of their sins, to come unto thee. My heart thinks of thy command and invitation, I come to thee; I am weary and heavy laden. First, let us think of the encouragement, that is our warrant, and then yield present obedience. And then what will be the issue? What will spring from it when the heart and obedience join with the command, that there is a meeting, that they concentrate the heart and obedience? God bids the heart obey. The heart saith, I do obey. When these meet, the issue must be exceeding comfortable. It cannot be otherwise, when the obedient heart meets God in his command, in his promise.

In all perplexity of business, 'commit thy way to the Lord, and he shall establish thy thoughts,' Prov. iii. 6, and other places. Lord, I commit my ways to thee; establish my thoughts and designs agreeable to thy will, because thou hast bid me commit my ways to thee.

In the hour of death, let us commend ourselves to God, 'as to a gracious and merciful Creator,' 1 Pet. iv. 19. Lord, I commend to thee my soul, who art the Creator of my soul and the Redeemer of it. Here is an obedience answerable. What can be the issue of it but comfort?

Therefore let us learn by the example of this blessed man, that when he had but a hint from God, 'Seek ye my face,' answers, 'Thy face, Lord, will I seek.'

Faith will see light at a little crevice. When it sees an encouragement once, a command, it will soon answer: and when it sees a promise, half a promise, it will welcome it. It is an obedient thing, 'the obedience of faith,' Rom. xvi. 26. It believes, and upon believing, it goes to God. As the servants of the king of Assyria, they catch the word presently, 'Thy servant Benhadad,' 1 Kings xx. 32; so faith, it catcheth the word.

To put God in mind, it is an excellent thing with the prophet, whosoever penned the 119th Psalm, whether David, or some other, 'Remember thy promise, wherein thou hast caused thy servant to trust,' ver. 49. As it is Neh. i. 8, 'Remember, Lord.' He puts God in mind of his promise; and so it is good often to put God in mind. Lord, thou hast made such and such promises. I know thou canst not deny thyself. If thou shouldst deny thy word, thou must deny thyself. Thy word is thyself. 'Remember thy promise, wherein thou hast caused thy servant to trust.' If I be deceived, thou hast deceived me, for thou hast given me this promise and this command. This is an excellent way to deal with God, as it were, to wrestle with him. 'By thy promise thou hast quickened me,' Ps. exix. 50. When I was dull and dead-hearted, then I thought on such and such a promise. I allege that promise, and apply it by a spirit of faith, and that quickened me.

And indeed, as I said, God hath made us fit to answer him, and we should study in all things to return unto him by his Spirit. Whatsoever God doth, the heart should return back again—love for love, knowledge for knowledge, seeking for seeking, choosing for choosing. He begins with us, he chooseth us, he loves us, he seeks us; and we, if ever we intend to be friends with God, and to entertain a holy communion, as all that shall be

saved must do, we should labour to have our hearts to return to God, what we find from God first. 'Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' To come more particularly to this seeking, which is the particular of the obedience and of the application.

'Thy face, Lord, will I seek.'

Seeking implies that our happiness is out of ourselves. It implies that there is somewhat in ourselves, in the application to which there must be some happiness. Therefore we go out of ourselves to seek. It is a motion, and it is out of an apprehension of some want; a man seeks out of some want, or out of some loss, or out of some duty. Either he hath loss, and therefore he seeks; or else he wants, and therefore he seeks; or else he owes respect and duty, and therefore he seeks. It is somewhat without a man that moves his seeking.

God need not seek the creature; he hath all fulness in himself. Indeed, his love makes him seek for our love, to be reconciled to him. But the creature, because his happiness is out of himself in communion with God, the fountain of all good, he must seek.

*Christians must be seekers.*

This is the generation of seekers, Ps. xxiv. 6. All mankind, if ever they will come to heaven, they must be a generation of seekers. Heaven is a generation of finders, of possessors, of enjoyers, seekers of God. But here we are a generation of seekers. We want somewhat that we must seek. When we are at best, we want the accomplishment of our happiness. It is a state of seeking here, because it is a state of want; we want something always.

But to come more particularly to this seeking the face of God, or the presence of God.

The presence of God, and the face of God, where is it to be sought for?

(1.) Know that first for a ground: *The presence of God it is everywhere.* But that is not the thing here purposed.

(2.) There is a face and presence of God *in everything, in every creature.* Therefore every creature hath the name of God; sometimes a rock: because God is strong, so a rock is strong. So likewise a shield; as a shield defends, so God defends us. There is some resemblance of God in the creature. Therefore God hath the name of the creature. But that is not here meant.

(3.) The presence of God meant here is, that presence that he shews *in the time of need, and in his ordinances.* He shews a presence in need and necessity, that is a gracious presence to his children, a gracious face. As in want of direction, he shews his presence of light to direct them; in weakness he shews his strength; in trouble and perplexity he will shew his gracious and comfortable presence to comfort them. In perplexity he shews his presence to set the heart at large, answerable to the necessity. So in need God is present with his children, to direct them, to comfort them, to strengthen them, if they need that.

(4.) And *in the issue of all business* there is a presence of God to give a blessing; for there is a presence must be even to the end of things. When we have all we would have, yet God must give a blessing. So you see there is a presence of God answerable to the necessity of man, as it hath reference to this place.

'Thy face will I seek,' to direct me by thy heavenly light when I know not what to do, as Jehoshaphat said, 'We know not what to do, but our eyes are towards thee,' 2 Chron. xx. 12. And so in weakness, when we



have no strength of our own, then go to God, to seek the face of God, that he would be present with us. So when we are comfortless, go to God that comforts the abject, 'the God of all comfort;' go to him, for his presence, for help. And when we are troubled in our hearts about success, what will become of such and such a business; go to God, that gives success and issue to all. Thus we see a presence of God answerable to every necessity of man.

(5.) There is a gracious presence of God likewise *in his ordinances*. That is the chief presence, next to heaven, the presence in God's ordinances; that is, in the unfolding of the word, in the administration of the sacraments, in the communion of saints. Indeed, in the ordinances God is graciously present. 'Where two or three are gathered together, I will be in the midst of them,' Mat. xviii. 20. Therefore in Rev. i. 12, *seq.*, it is said, 'that Christ walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;' that is, in the midst of the church. There is a gracious presence of Christ in the midst of the candlesticks. He takes his walk there. Christ hath a special presence in his church in the ordinances; and that David aims at here too, not only, I will seek thy face in trouble and necessity, when I need anything from thee, but 'Thy face will I seek in all thine ordinances,' to enable me for the other. For it is in vain for a man to think to seek God in his necessity and exigence, if he seek not God in his ordinances, and do not joy in them. So you see where the face and presence of God is to be sought; in necessities of all kinds, and in the ordinances.

Now, in our seeking the presence or face of God, there is four or five things that I will touch the heads of.

[1.] First of all, seeking implies *observance*. Seek my face; that is, observe me, respect me as a God. 'Thy face I will seek,' I will be a follower of thee; as in English an 'observer' is a follower, a creature. It is a proud word; as if man could make a man of nothing. And indeed they are creatures in that kind, they are raised of nothing. To seek a man is to observe him. There is a notable place for it, Prov. xxix. 26, 'Many seek the ruler's favour.' In the Greek translation, the Septuagint, the word is, to observe and respect a man, which is translated seeking (*c*). Many observe the ruler; but every man's judgment cometh from the Lord. You see those that think to rise by the favour of such or such a man, they will be his followers, as I said, and observe him; they study men; as those that rise by favour that way, they study not books so much as men, what may delight such a man, what he respects. Surely they will serve him at every turn. A base atheist makes a man his god. That he may rise, he will deny God and the motions of conscience, and honesty, and all to observe the face of a great man whom he hopes to rise by. But a true Christian observes the great God. The greatest preferment comes from him. So it signifies to 'observe.'

In Ps. lxii. 11, there you shall see the ground of observation is, that power belongs to God. 'I have heard once, nay, twice.' He heard it twice by the meditation of it, by going over it in his heart again. I have heard once, nay, twice; that is, I thought again and again on it; that is, hearing of it oft. We may hear a truth a hundred times, that is, by meditating of it. 'I have heard once, nay, twice, that power belongs to God;' that is, riches and power to advance a man. Atheistical men think all belongs to the creature, but power belongs to God. That is one thing that is meant by seeking, diligent observing of God, and respect to him and his will and commandments in all things.

If so be that a person of great place should say, Observe me, and I will prefer you, I hope men would be ready enough, they need no more words. Here is the atheism of our hearts. God saith, I will do all good for you. The greatest preferment is to be the child of God here, and the heir of heaven after. What preferment is there to that of Christianity! And he saith, Seek my face, observe me, respect me, let the eye of your souls be to me, as it is in the Psalm, 'As the eyes of a maid are toward the hand of her mistress,' Ps. exxiii. 2. The obedience of a servant is toward the eye of the commander, so the obedience of a Christian is toward the eye of God, to see what God commands. We should be more serviceable to God. It is an argument of the atheism of our hearts, to take more encouragement from a mortal man that can raise us and do us a pleasure, than from God himself. But to let that go, that is the first branch, 'Seek my face,' that is, observe me.

[2.] Then seek my face; that is, *depend upon me*. To seek God's face, is to depend upon him for all. It argues dependence. For him that we observe, we observe him for something. We depend upon him to be our raiser and maker. So seek my face, seek my countenance and favour; depend upon me, and it shall be sufficient for you.

[3.] Then, in the third place, 'Seek my face;' that is, *seek my favour and grace*. Favour appears and shines in the face. 'Seek my face,' observe me, depend on me; for what? For my favour. What is that? It is all. If we have the grace of God, we have all. For the grace of God is in every thing that is good to us. If we have the graces to salvation, they come of free grace: every good gift is the grace of God. Children are the grace of God. So, if we have the grace of God, we have all for our good. We have all in the spring of good, which is the grace and favour of God. As men, if they be graced from a great person, they study not this and that particular thing. They think, I have his favour, and that favour of his is ready for all exigences. And therefore, in way of compliment, they say, I seek not this or that, but your favour.

The favour of God, it is a storehouse, and spring, and fountain, better than life itself; as the psalmist saith, 'The loving-kindness of the Lord is better than life,' Ps. lxxiii. 3. When life fails, the favour of God never fails. Life will fail, and all earthly comforts; but the favour of God is better than life itself; it is everlasting and eternal. In Psalm iv. 7, you see how worldly, atheistical men rejoice when their corn and wine and oil increase. And 'who will shew us any good?' who? It is no matter who; any good, any hope of preferment, it is no matter what way; and it is no matter what, any good; and let them but shew it and we will work it out, we have wit enough. Oh, saith he, but your wit I stand not upon, nor your courses; but, 'Lord, let thy face shine upon me, lift up the light of thy countenance,' and that shall be instead of all honours and preferments. So in seeking we must observe God, and depend upon him; and for what? For his favour especially; for the face and favour of God. Let me have a good look from thee, O Lord; let me have thy favour and love. For other things I leave them to thy wisdom, thou art wise enough; only let thy face shine on me.

Oh this favour and face of God, it is a sweet thing, this presence of God! What is heaven but the presence of God there? Let God be present in a dungeon, it will be a paradise; let God be absent, paradise it is as a hell or dungeon, as it was to Adam; after he had sinned, he ran to hide himself. What is hell but the want of God's presence? God's face and

favour is not there. What makes hell in the heart of a man? God is not there, but leaves the heart to its own darkness and confusion. Oh therefore, the face and favour of God, seek that especially!

[4.] Again, To seek the face of God *is to pray to him, to put this in execution in prayer.* Everywhere in Scripture it is all one to pray and to seek God's face. It is called the spirit of prayer; which because I have spoken of at large out of another scripture, I will now say nothing of it.\*

[5.] Likewise, in the next place, to seek the face of God *is to attend upon the presence of God, wheresoever he reveals himself:* to attend upon the word and ordinances is to 'seek the face of God.' It is said that Cain went from the face of God when he went from the worship of God in his father's house; he went out from God, Gen. iv. 16. Where God is worshipped, there God is present; and when we leave the place where God is worshipped, we leave God's presence. God is more especially present there, therefore seeking the face of God is to attend upon God's ordinance: 'I will seek thy face;' that is, wheresoever there is any presence of thee I will seek thee.

Christ when he was lost, he was found in the temple. That hath a literal sense, but it is true in a spiritual sense. If we lose Christ, and have not comfort from Christ, we shall find him in the temple. The sweetest presence of his Spirit is there. His body is in heaven, and his Spirit is his vicar in the world. If we want comfort and direction from Christ, we shall meet him in the temple. There he gives us sweet meetings by his Spirit; there we have the comfort, and direction, and spiritual strength that we wanted before we came. There is the best meeting. As in the Canticles, Christ goes into the 'garden of spices.' He goes among his children, that are as a watered garden, and as so many plants of righteousness and beds of spices. He delights to be there. Christ is in the communion of saints in the ordinances, therefore 'thy face will I seek,' especially in the tabernacle, and temple after; especially in the church and communion of saints, there thy face will I seek. Thus we see the unfolding of this promise of a gracious, obedient, respective heart: 'Thy face will I seek.' I will add no more, but come to the use of it.

*Use.* And in the first place, by way of direction, that we may seek the face of God—that is, observe him, and depend upon him, and enjoy his favour, and meet with him in his ordinances—we must first get

*The knowledge of God [and of] ourselves.*

1. *Get the knowledge of God,* for they that know him will seek to him. They that know his riches, his power, his sufficiency, in a word, his all-sufficiency for all things, they will seek to him. And they that know themselves, that know their wants, their inability to supply those wants, and know the greatness of those wants, and that they must be supplied, they will out of themselves. They that have nothing at home will seek abroad. The knowledge of these two therefore, of the great God, the all-sufficient God; and of ourselves, the insufficiency of ourselves every way, either for direction, or for protection, or for comfort in distress, or for strength in duty to go through business, or for issue when we are about anything; 'they that know that the way of man is not in man,' as Jeremiah saith, x. 23, they would certainly out of themselves. Therefore let us grow in the knowledge of God and of ourselves, of our own wants and necessities.

And especially know God now in Christ. For there is enmity between the nature of God and the nature of man, of sinful man; but that Christ

\* Cf. the General Index under 'Prayer.'—G.

hath taken our nature now and made it lovely to God, and God lovely to us. Christ Immanuel, God and man, 'God with us,' hath made God and us friends. Therefore now we must go to God in that Immanuel, in Christ, that ladder that joins heaven and earth together. See God's face shining in Christ, his gracious face, and this will encourage us to go to God together with our wants. Go not to absolute God, a God without a mediator; for then God is 'a consuming fire,' Heb. xii. 29.

2. In the next place, when we go to God, and seek to God, be sure to *seek his favour and grace in the first place*. If we want any particular thing, protection or direction or comfort in distress, go not for that in the first place, but let us see in what terms God and we are; let us be sure that reconciliation and peace be made. For if we seek to God in our particular wants, and have not made our peace before, but have sought to other gods, to men, and to our shifts,\* God may say, You seek to me! Go to the gods you have served, to the great men you have served, to the riches you have trusted unto, go to your shifts.\* Therefore, first, make peace and reconciliation with God before you seek other things. If a man have offended a great person, he doth not go and seek particular favours, till first he have made peace and taken up the quarrel. Let us take up the quarrel between God and us, by repentance and a promise of new obedience; get reconciliation that way, and then seek for particular favours after.

For what if God give you particular favours, if they be not from his grace and favour, what will they do us good? What will all that a reprobate wretch hath do him good? What will his favours, his riches, and honours and preferments do him good when he dies, when he shall conflict with the anger of God? when he shall see hell before him and see heaven shut? He seeth he hath all, from a general providence and as a reward for his care in this world. God answereth him with a civil enlargement for his civil obedience, but he hath his reward. Heaven he hath not, he cared not for it. What will all do without the love of God in Christ? Therefore I beseech you, let us first seek the favour and mercy of God in Christ.

And then for particular things go to him as the exigence is; for in God there is a supply for all turns, and that is the ground of seeking; for our seeking it must be a wise seeking. Now it were not wise, unless there were a supply in God for every want, whatsoever it is. If the creature could do anything without God, we should upon good ground make that God. If anything could raise us without God, I mean, to comfort, we might seek to them, and make them God upon good reason; but what can they do? In anger, God may let a man enjoy favours, as the fruits of his displeasure, but what can they do without him? They can do nothing. Therefore it must be the supreme cause, the highest cause, the great wheel that turns every little inferior wheel in the world. They turn with the great wheel of divine providence and goodness; therefore go to him as the first cause. . .

3. Again, In seeking the favour of God, we must search our consciences, *to come with pure and clean hearts to God to seek him*. If we regard 'iniquity in our hearts, God will not hear our prayers,' Ps. lxi. 18. We come to God with a purpose to offend him. If we come not with a purpose to leave our sins, why do we come? God will not regard our prayers. We must come with pure consciences to God, as it is excellently set down, Ps. xxiv. 3, 'Who shall ascend into thy hill, O Lord? who shall stand in thy holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart.' And then he saith after,

\* That is, 'expedients.'—G.

'This is the generation of them that seek him,' those that have clean hands and a pure heart. Thou hast foul hands ; thou art a briber, a corrupter ; thou hast an impure heart ; thou art a filthy creature ; thou hast lived in such and such sins ; cleanse thy hands and thy heart. 'This is the generation of them that seek him.' If a man seek the pure and holy God with an unclean heart and unclean hands ; if he be corrupt in his hands and in his heart, that is the fountain, he may seek God long enough before he find him, and if he see God, it is in anger.

4. Again, If we would seek the face and favour of God, *let us study the word hard.* Study the promises, as I said before, bind him with his own word. Thou hast said thus, I allege thy own word. Jacob, when he wrestled with God, Gen. xxxii. 24, then he saw God ; he called the place Peniel, that is, the face of God, because of seeing God. Upon wrestling, when the heart by faith wrestleth with God by the promise—'Lord thou hast done this ; though I feel no comfort, yet I will rest upon thee'—that place will be Peniel ; the face of God will be there, God will shew himself.

And let the extremity be what it will, seek God in extremity ; allege the word of God in extremity. What word have you for extremity ? 'In the mountain God will be seen,' Gen. xxii. 14. His face will be seen in the mount ; that is, when there is no other help whatsoever. 'God is a present help in trouble,' Ps. xlv. 5. He is the 'God that comforteth the abject,' 2 Cor. vii. 6, that none else can comfort ; 'and he that is in darkness, and sees no light, let him trust in the name of the Lord,' Isa. l. 10. And 'though I were in the valley of the shadow of death,' if the Lord be with me, 'I will trust in him,' Ps. xxiii. 4. 'And though thou kill me, yet will I trust in thee,' saith Job, Job xiii. 15. In extremity seek God then, and find out words and promises then, as the Scriptures is large in that kind ; for then there is most need of seeking God. Lord, if thou help not now, none can help.

And this is the difference between a true child of God and another. In the time of extremity, Saul seeks to the witch ; but David seeks to God, as here, 'Lord, thy face will I seek.' Many things upbraided David, no question, with his sin and the affliction he was in. Thou seek God ! Thou hast offended him, and now thou endurest some sign of his displeasure. A heavy case, beloved, sometimes, especially in the time of extremity. Then conscience saith, I am in extremity, and withal God follows me with such and such sins. A guilty conscience meets me in my prayers to God and upbraids me, Thou hast done so and so ; that if there be not faith, and a word of God to lay hold on in extremity, what will become of the poor soul ? It is swallowed up. No question David was now in pangs, and many things offered to thrust him off, and he might say, 'I have many things to discourage me,' yet 'thy face, Lord, will I seek,' for deliverance out of trouble and for pardon of sin. Set the promise of God and the pardon of sin above all extremity whatsoever. God is the God of all and above all, he is 'the God of comfort.' If comforts be wanting, he can make them anew. In the want of means, and when means are against us, let us seek to God. Jonah in the whale's belly, that was a creature that might have consumed him with heat, 'when he was in the belly of hell, he called unto God,' Jonah ii. 2. If a man be as low as hell, if he have a command to come, and a promise, it will fetch him thence. Therefore allege the promises and the word.

What a miserable taking are they in, that in extremity have no acquaintance with God's word—with the promises or good examples—that have

stored up nothing! Alas! they are in the midst of a storm naked; in the midst of war and opposition disarmed; they lie open to all assaults. Therefore, as you love your own souls, gather grounds of comfort, treasure up promises and holy truths, that in extremity you may say with David, upon good ground, Lord, thou hast said thus and thus; and in this extremity I come to thee. 'Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' Break through all fears and discouragements whatsoever; allege the command of God, and the promise of God, and the encouragements of God. My discouraged heart saith thus, and Satan saith thus; but, Lord, thou sayest thus, 'Seek my face.' Shall not I believe and obey God more than the devil or mine own lying false heart? Therefore, except we will betray our souls to temptations, and betray the comforts that we have, let us seek God in all extremities.

I desire you to remember these directions, and be encouraged to seek to God. Join the seeking in extremity, with the seeking him in his ordinances. If we do not seek him in his ordinances, in the time of peace, let us never think he will be so familiar with us in the time of trouble. If we be not acquainted with him in his ordinances in prosperity, in extremity he will be far off. Therefore 'seek the face of God' now, in all his ordinances. That is the way to have provision of strength against all other extremities whatsoever. It is a great comfort in extremity to one that hath sought God in his ordinances before. Foolish atheistical men seek not the wisdom of God in his ordinances. God cries to them and they regard it not. But then they cry to God, and God will not answer them, but 'laugh at their destruction,' Ps. xxxvii. 13. And as it is in Zechariah, you cry, 'and I will not hear, because I cried and ye would not hear,' vii. 11. When God speaks and we regard it not, we shall cry and he will not regard it. Therefore, as we desire his presence in the evil day, let us labour to hear him now. Let us search his will, what he requires of us, and what he will do for us, and labour to be armed with obedience against the time of distress.

And *let us seek him betimes*. Now presently seek the favour of God, you that are young. 'In the morning early will I seek thee,' Ps. lxxiii. 1. In the morning of your years, in the morning of the day, it is good to seek God, before the heart be possessed with other business, that he may bless all our affairs. Seek his face, that his blessing, and direction, and strength may be upon all. Let us set upon things in his wisdom and strength, and hope on his blessing.

And in the morning of your years, early, put not off. For here is the mischief. If we seek not God early, betimes, the heart will be hardened, and will grow worse; to-morrow we shall be more unfit than to-day. Then those that seek in their sickness, and at the hour of death, that is self-love. It is grace to seek God for himself, out of old acquaintance and love. But to seek him in sickness only, and to neglect his ordinances, it is merely self-love. As a malefactor that carries himself ill in prison, and then seeks the judge's face at the bar; when God arraigns a man at the bar, then to seek him, it comes from self-love. But that obedience we owe to God is to seek him out of a new nature, out of love of God's goodness and grace. When we seek him in extremity, not out of the love of grace, but to escape the danger of hell and damnation, such seeking seldom proves good. Many make a great show of repentance and turning to God, many of those prove false. He that is good in affliction only is never good. Therefore put not off seeking God's face, by prayer and the use of all good means.

Many men first settle their estates, and then send for a physician, and

the divine last of all, when they are sick. Oh but seek God first, and above all things in the world, or else we have adulterous, idolatrous hearts, to make the face of man our idol, or health our idol. We should seek God's face above all.

The Scripture sets him out sweetly to us. Therefore one way to encourage us to seek to God, is to present to our souls God, under those sweet terms. He is a rock in the midst of the waves; he is a habitation in the midst of a storm: 'Thou art our habitation,' Ps. lxxi. 3. He is called a hiding-place, he hath the shadow of his wings to cover us; let us fly under the shadow of his wings. He is presented sweetly to us in Christ. Therefore let us have recourse to him upon all occasions; and now, now that we may be familiar with him, that we may be acquainted with him now, in the days of our youth, and he will know us in age and sickness. If we be not acquainted with him now, he will not acquaint himself with us then. Therefore seek his face now, and above all things seek it.

And can we have more encouragement? There was never any that sought the face of God that went away sorry. It is said of some good emperors, that never any man went sorry out of their presence; either they had the grant of their suits or good words (*d*). God sends none sorry away. There are none that come into the presence of God but they are the better for it. They go away more cheerful and more satisfied. Their consciences are quieted when they pour out their souls to God. There is 'the peace of God which passeth understanding, preserves their soul,' as it is Philip. iv. 7. 'In nothing be careful: but let there be thanksgiving for favours received, and let your requests be made known to him; and the peace of God shall preserve your hearts and minds,' Philip. iv. 6. You shall not despair and be over much cast down, peace will preserve you.

And if we do not seek the face of God now, when we may enjoy his presence, we shall never see his face in glory hereafter. We must now be acquainted with him, or else we shall not when we would. Therefore, as we may enjoy the presence of God in his ordinances, so in all our affairs let us seek his face and blessing. Let us have what we have, and do what we do, in his blessing and assistance, and not in the strength of wit and shifts.\* Let us do what we do by divine strength, and in confidence of his blessing. That that we do by his strength we may expect his blessing on; we cannot do so by our shifts. Let us inure ourselves in these courses, and we shall find much peace; and by long acquaintance with God we shall be able to commit our souls to him; we shall be able to look him in the face at the hour of death. He that looks God in the face often in prayer, and seeking him, may look death in the face. These things may be made effectual if your hearts be prepared, as the Scripture phrase is.

And because I mentioned preparing: that is a word in Scripture that is set before seeking. Rehoboam did not thrive, he did not 'prepare his heart to seek God,' 2 Chron. xii. 14. Jehoshaphat was blessed of God, 'he prepared his heart to seek the Lord,' 2 Chron. xx. 3. Therefore let us come prepared to seek God, prepare our hearts to seek him. Think, When I go to the congregation, I go to seek God's face; therefore come in humility and subjection. And in all the courses of our lives, let all of us prepare, and set our hearts in frame to seek God in all things; and let us set upon nothing that we cannot depend on him for assistance, and look to

\* That is, 'expedients.'—G.

him for a blessing. And when we cannot enjoy his favour and blessing in anything, we were as good be without it as have it.

This is the way to have our wills in all things. Christ, the truth itself, hath left us this one sweet promise, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God,' Matt. vi. 33. He speaks there of seeking our own good. What is the best thing we should seek for? 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God,' of grace, and of glory; the favour of God, and the fruit of his favour, grace. Seek those best things in the first place. What then? It is the way to have all things else, as far as they are for our good. But we would have more. We think if we seek to God, and depend upon God's divine principles and rules, it is a way to beggary and disgrace. Oh no. It is the way to have our own desire in all things, as far as it is for our good. Let us seek first the kingdom of God, that God may rule and reign in us, and we shall reign in the kingdom of God. For other things, God will bring it to pass I know not how, they shall be cast upon us. He that is full for heaven and happiness, God will make him full for the world, and successful, as much as he sees fit to bring him to heaven. If God see anything that would hinder him, he must leave that to his wisdom.

Therefore let us labour to be able from truth of heart to return to the commandment and promise of God, this sweet and gracious answer of the holy man David, when God saith generally or particularly, 'Seek my face,' 'Thy face, Lord, will I seek.'

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#### NOTES.

(a) P. 114.—'As Saint Augustine said of himself, "God spake often to me, and I was ignorant of it."' A frequent self-accusation in the 'Confessions.' Cf. note f, Vol. II. page 194.

(b) P. 116.—'God hath framed the Scriptures not to be limited to the times wherein they were written, as the papists idly speak, Bellarmine and others.' A commonplace of the popish controversy. Cf. *mn*, Vol. III. page 535.

(c) P. 125.—"Many seek the ruler's favour." In the Greek translation, the Septuagint, the word is to "observe" and respect a man, which is translated "seeking." The LXX rendering is πολλοὶ δεραπέουσιν, *i. e.*, δεραπέω = to wait upon, to minister unto, to serve.

(d) P. 131.—'It is said of some good emperors, that never any man went sorry out of their presence; either they had the grant of their suits or good words.' This is said of various of the Cæsars: *e. g.*, Julius Cæsar, Antoninus, and later, of Constantine.

G.