

THE KNOT OF PRAYER LOOSED.

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NOTE.

'The Knot of Prayer Loosed' forms No. 16 of 'The Saint's Cordials' of 1629. It was not inserted in the after-editions. Its separate title is given below.*

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* THE KNOT OF PRAYER LOOSED.

In One SERMON.

Wherein is shewed,

The Conditions, Limitations, Qualities, Companions, and
Attendants of Prayer; The Causes of the Difficulties therein: How to

• pray as we may be heard, nourishing and quick-
ning our Faith, &c.

Prælucendo Pereo.

VPRIGHTNES HATH BOLDNES.

IAMES. 1. 5.

*If any of you lacke wisdom, let him aske of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and
upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.*

LONDON,

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THE KNOT OF PRAYER LOOSED.

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, who, if his son ask bread, will give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask them?—MAT. VII. 7-10.

I HOPE it will not be offensive to any here present,—it may be profitable to some,—briefly to repeat what I have spoken in another place of this text.* The whole contains an exhortation to prayer, Christ's exhortation to Christ's hearers. The parts are two.

1. The exhortation strictly taken, pointing out the duty.
2. The motives and arguments enforcing the same. In brief,
The nail and the hammer.

The duty is laid down in these words, 'ask,' 'seek,' 'knock;' all of them whetting on our dulness; by which we may see, the pressing of these things in this manner imports diligence, that we should set on the same eagerly, yea, with an earnest desire of obtaining our suit, as we do with those we have occasion to speak with, whom by all means we importune for a despatch. Our Lord here would have us so to make haste, using all means and diligence for obtaining of our suit.

The motives are,

1. Ordinate, directly urging the duty.
2. Subordinate, standing as helps and supporters thereunto.

The motives ordinate are these: 'Ask, and receive;' 'seek, and find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.' The argument is taken from a threefold promise, according to the threefold urging of the duty. In sum, the success they should have, that they shall speed.

The subordinate arguments follow the former, and they are of two sorts, simple or by comparison. The simple in these words, 'For every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.' And this simple argument is drawn, as it were, from the common experience of others, as if our Lord should have said, Since it is found by sure and certain experience, that every one that asketh

* The previous Sermons have not been preserved.—G.

receiveth, why should not ye also, if ye ask, think to speed as well as others?

Lastly, There is set down an argument of comparison, from the lesser to the greater, from fathers on earth, endowed with a little of that pity and mercy, the greater fountain and ocean whereof is in God; from which the inference is, that if earthly and evil parents will be ready to hear their children, and give good things unto them, how much more will our good and heavenly Father be ready to hear and grant our requests, that is, give good things to such as ask in faith? This is the sum.

From the exhortation note, the duty of prayer is a common task, so that every Christian, who would be in deed and not in name so called only, he must be a man of prayer. Then, in the next place, from the exhortation and reason laid together, note the potent means by which we shall be best enabled to receive from God what we would; and what we have need of is prayer. There might be, but needs not, many proofs of this, whereof there was delivered many uses then; the last and main whereof was, that we should learn to make more reckoning of our prayers than formerly we have done, that as we reckon our states in bonds and bills, and that we have beyond seas in stock, as well as that we have in possession by us; so we should reckon in our spiritual wealth, not only what we have and feel, but also that stock of prayer we have long since adventured to a far country, as merchants do of that they have adventured to East India: so much the rather, because these may fail in whole or in part, and so that stock may perish; but the adventure and return of this stock of prayer is most certain to increase more, which, if we do, we shall be sure of a more quick and speedy return. Hence we came to a knotty and great objection.

Obj. Whether all men in prayer have this assurance to be heard, seeing Christ's promise is so sure and firm?

Ans. There are indeed a great many Christians full of complaints and discouragements this way. Oh, say some, I have prayed thus and thus long, and am worse and worse; I have prayed and am not heard; better leave all, seeing I am not the better for it. I answer, Though our Lord do speak so confidently, yet God's charter must be interpreted to God's meaning, with such conditions and limitations as he hath revealed unto us out of his word, which, though not named here, yet must be understood. We are undone, every mother's son, if we lose any part of that charter Christ hath made, to think we can make no certain return of our prayers sent to our heavenly country; for it remains always sure, 'Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.' For the better answering of the objection, here comes two things to be considered,

1. Conditions on our part; 2. Limitations on God's part.

1. The first thing in the conditions on our part is concerning the party that must pray: he must be a free denizen in the state of faith and repentance. An outlawed man can put up no petitions with assurance to speed. St John saith, 'This is the confidence we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us,' 1 John v. 14. The will of God is, that he who prays be a man qualified; so all the promises of God are made, at least to such who hunger and thirst and desire to be in Christ. Faithless, godless, careless men are outlawed, as we see, Ps. l. 15, 16, the promise is, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me;' and then presently he makes a stop. 'But unto

the wicked God saith, What hast thou to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth ? seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my word behind thee.'

Obj. Here some may object, that even many heathens have been heard in their prayers who were not thus qualified.

Ans. To which I answer, It is not out of the privilege of this great charter here that such are heard ; but out of his common goodness unto all, whereby he would draw even the most rebellious to admiration of his divine abundant mercies, yea, and even teach us, if such prevail thus, much more shall we, being within the covenant.

2. The second is, Our prayers must be made to God alone.

3. Thirdly, They must pass under the seal of the Mediator.

For though all Christians may claim a part in the charter, yet the title must be pleaded in the Mediator's name only ; no Mediator to thee, no hearing.

4. Fourthly, Concerning the things prayed for, they must be lawful in kind also ; not fore-excepted, nor under any general nor particular limitations forbidden. Not everything we desire is rightly asked, some of which may cross his nature and will ; some things also are ill for us, by general and special decree forbidden, as exemption from afflictions and sufferings with him. If God hear us not in this, Christ forfeits not his word, but we our prayers.

5. Fifthly, That we have a right end in prayer ; as James iv. 3, the apostle speaks, ' You ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts.' If the end be naught, the prayer is confiscate.

6. Sixthly, The time ; there be certain seasons and times wherein the Lord will be found ; as Dan. ix. 2, when he knew the time of the captivity to be near expired, then he prays for the return of the people. If we wait and seek in season, we may obtain ; but otherwise we may have a nap, and the door be knocked against our heads. Since then, ' there is a time that the Lord will be found,' as the prophet speaks, Isa. lv. 6, I would not have us omit our time, but now when there is a stirring of the Spirit, let us take the opportunity, lest we miss it when we shall have most need of it.

7. Seventhly, There is the manner, under which I comprehend the order of the things asked and desired. If we would speed in temporal things, we must first seek spiritual, saith our Saviour ; ' But seek ye first the kingdom of heaven, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you,' Mat. vi. 33. If we miss of this, we may knock long ere we have entrance. To come to God and seek oil and wine, and the like things, and in the mean time to neglect the oil of grace, what a disorder is here. If in this case thou be crossed, it is not because he would put thee off without hearing, but because he would teach thee a better way to speed. For as when we eat our meat disorderly we want digestion, and for the most part buy experience at a dear rate, so many times God doth beat his dearest children, and put off their prayers for a long time, that he may teach them in due order what is first and principally to be desired ; all these the party praying must carefully look unto for speeding in his suit.

Further, we have to observe in prayer,

1. The qualities. 2. The companions. 3. The attendants of prayer.

1. *The qualities of prayer.*

(1.) That it be the prayer of *faith*; not generally and confusedly of the Godhead only, but distinctly of the persons, and of the redemption purchased, and of the hearing of thy petitions, having interest in him, 'Believe and it shall be given thee.'

(2.) *Humility*; that a man go to God with a knowledge and a sense of his own insufficiency to succour himself. No man may come to God, but upon his knees. I speak not of the bowing of the knee, but of the heart; it is written, 'God will hear the desires of the humble,' Ps. ix. 12. In misery, affliction, sense of our necessity, and the like, we should assure ourselves to be heard.

(3.) *The heat and fervency of prayer*. Our God, which is a 'consuming fire,' Heb. xii. 29, doth not endure a cold prayer; the heart must be elevated, as Hannah, her heart spake unto the Lord, 1 Sam. i. 13; and Saint James saith, 'the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much,' James v. 16. By the contrary, a cold prayer hath but a cold answer; that man is but a mocker of prayer, that would have God to hear him, when he hears not himself.

2. *The companions of prayer*.

(1.) First, *Charity* which extends itself toward all men, and a brotherly love toward the saints, joined with graciousness in ourselves; and it hath two things in it, giving and forgiving. He that would have mercy, must shew mercy; rich men may do the one, and all men may do the other, but the other is harder, to forgive. He that is able to give, and relieve others as their need shall require, and yet will not, let him not wonder if God deny his suit; and so he that will not forgive others, let him not look to be forgiven. 'Blessed is he,' saith the Scripture, 'that judgeth wisely of the poor, the Lord shall deliver him in the day of trouble,' Ps. xli. 1. If thou ask, and speed not, in this case marvel not; thou hast denied him in his own members asking of thee, and therefore it is just with him to deny thee.

(2.) The second is, *Thankfulness* for benefits and blessings received and enjoyed, with forgiveness of the old debts; thanksgiving ere we beg more mercies. For this cause we speed not in our suits; because we forget him, he forgets us.

3. *The attendants of prayer*.

(1.) First, *Perseverance*, called 'watching with prayer;' as we see our Lord teacheth us by the example of the importunate widow, and the unjust judge, thereby intimating for our comfort, how much more certainly, in the like case, we may assure ourselves to speed with him, who is the most just judge of the world, and goodness itself. So that he that will be sure to have this promise, 'Ask and ye shall have, seek and ye shall find,' made good unto him, he must make a trade of prayer, not for two or three times, and so have done, but he must still ask, and so obtain. As he desires constancy in holding out in our suits, so he would have us ask constantly without fainting; and as he will give conveniently in the best time, so he shews we shall still be set on work in begging, as his mercy shall be in giving.

(2.) The second is, *diligence in the means*; we tempt him, to ask for that we labour not for. As we pray, so our endeavours must second our devotion; for to ask maintenance, and not put our hands to the work, it is as to knock at the door, and yet to pull the door unto us that it open not. In this case, if we pray for grace, and neglect the spring from whence it comes, how can we then speed? It was a rule in the ancient time, 'Lay,

thy hand on the plough, and then pray ;' no man in old time might pray without ploughing, nor plough without praying (a).

(3.) The third is, *Expectation, waiting, perseverance in hope, until God hear us*. The reason is, because the Lord, who hath promised the thing, hath not limited the time. In this we may see what patience brings forth, as the prophet's experience is, Ps. xl. 1 : 'I waited patiently for the Lord, and he inclined to me, and heard my cry;' and in another place he saith, 'It is good for man both to wait, and trust in the Lord,' ver. 4 ; so, Rev. iii. 10, he saith, 'because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I will also keep thee from the hour of temptation,' &c. This waiting doth interest us in him, when we are so earnest that we will not away till we speak with him ; as, when a man knows a party he desires to speak with to be in such a house, and that he will come forth, he waits at the door, and will not away till he speak with him, so, if we were earnest, and had faith and assurance that God would come, we would stand still at the door till he came, and not be gone and faint upon every light occasion. All of us fall in this, that we wait not constantly at the door of grace till we obtain. Gross sins indeed, these cause a man to faint, that he dare not look God in the face but with much ado ; but if we strive and labour to hold out, God accepts of the truth, though the measure be small, when we cannot do as we would. But if there be gross failings in this kind, that we fall into the old bias of our sins, and so leave knocking, or are quickly weary, we obtain not by and by, as though we might limit him the time. If, I say, in this case, like the raven sent out of the ark, our prayers return no more, and we faint and sink comfortless in desolation, anguish, and sorrow of mind, let us not blame our Saviour, whose promise is firm and inviolable without change. If we would learn to mend our prayers and wait, we should hear more from him. All these are limitations on our part.

Secondly, The limitations on God's part.

In general, we must be wary that our misunderstanding of providence make us not to fail : first, all such things are excepted, as God cannot give unto our prayers without crossing some part of his revealed will, or a secret government and providence of his, which we would not willingly cross, if we knew it, but rather submit ourselves unto the same, as Christ did in his agony, 'Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt,' Mat. xxvi. 39. I say then, God will so give, as may not cross himself in anything. There are some things God cannot grant, I speak with reverence, unless he forfeit his word. A man prays and says, 'Lord, forgive me my sins,' without a desire to leave them, or resolution of a new course of life, but goes on, swears and sins again ; God cannot in this case hear such a one, because it is against his word to hear sinners, so long as with delight and without remorse they love the sin. The prophet saith, 'If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear me,' Ps. lxvi. 18. Therefore, seeing God cannot lie, repent, nor deny himself, such a one cannot be heard.

Again, an idle man in his calling, though he pray much and often to prosper therein, God, if he make his word good, will not grant his suit. As he hath said, 'the hand of the diligent maketh rich,' Prov. x. 4, so, on the contrary, he hath said in other places, 'that the sluggard shall be clothed with rags ; that his soul shall desire, and have nothing ; that because he will not plough in the cold, therefore he shall beg in harvest,' Prov. xx. 4, and thou, O sluggard, dost thou think then to obtain anything without pains-taking ? So in another kind the Jews bade Christ to come down from the cross, and save himself, if he were the son of God ; when in the mean time

for the very same thing, because he was the Son of God, and had undertaken and promised to finish then the work of our redemption, he might not come down from the cross and save himself from that hour. And further, when a man blesseth himself in sin, as it is Deut. xxix. 19, saying in his heart, that 'he shall have peace, walking in the imagination of his heart; adding drunkenness to thirst,' &c., God hath passed his word, that he will not spare such a man, but his wrath shall smoke against him, and all the curses that are written in the book of God shall lie upon him. In this case, continuing and delighting in sin, God cannot hear such a prayer, unless he forget his word. Understand thou, man, God could never be held by such prayers that cross his will, and the manner of his government, yea, such against which he hath so often protested in his word.

Secondly, In the things asked, he understands that such should be good for us in lawfulness of circumstances, as,

1. The quality of the same good things. 2. The time. 3. The means.
4. The manner. 5. The measure.

I. For the first, [*'the quality'*]. We know the main promise, made to the faithful, Rom. viii. 28, is, that 'all things work together for good unto them that love God.' Therefore, that which cannot be unto thee for good it is not intended, nor ever shall be given, if God do love thee. See also in my text, the last part of Christ's last argument is the same in effect: 'how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask them?' The physician knows better than the patient what is good for him, so that I say, for this cause many things are profitably denied us, which could not conveniently without hurt be granted: as we see fathers will keep from their children knives, burning sticks, and all such sharp and dangerous things, not because they love them not, but because they love them so much, therefore they will keep from them all things hurtful.

II. Secondly, *For the time*. God gives us his bill, but he will pay at his pleasure. There is a time, but when, that is concealed; not that it is uncertain unto God, but it is hid from thee, as in Ps. lxxxvi. 7, 'He will hear,' but it is 'in the time of trouble;' yea, of great trouble and sorrow; betwixt the cup and the lip, as the proverb is. It was Abraham's experience: Gen. xxii. 14, 'In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen;' all things were there ready for a sacrifice, the wood was laid, the fire was ready, Isaac was bound, the hand and knife lifted up to kill and cut asunder the only son, and son of the promise; but at an instant came a stop unlooked for, which mercy being so great, it was then made unto us an instance for ever, that even in the most desperate cases we should not despair, but hope against hope, as he did. Now, why the Lord thus delays to help and hear us, there be divers reasons.

(1.) First, *That our faith and dependence on him might be the better tried*, which experience, though it be sore, yet we must be courageous, since the issue is joyful; though it be bitter, yet the victory obtained is great, as we may see in the woman of Canaan, a good suitor, having a good suit, yet how doth our Lord put her off a long time, that to others he might open the faith of this woman, and make her unto us a precedent for ever, Mat. vii. 6, *et seq.*

(2.) Secondly, *Sometimes it is done to humble men*, as Judges xx. In a good quarrel, having a good cause, we know what befell them. See what need we have of prayer to do all things aright. They consult with God

what to do ; they receive encouragement from him to go on, and yet are overthrown ; the second time they weep, and mourn, and are beaten again. In such a case it seemeth strange to be overcome. Well, the third time they weep and fast, are humbled before God for their own sins, ere they seek revenge for other men's, then they prevail. Thus 'God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble,' James iv. 6. Till we be nothing in our own eyes, he never comes with comfortable deliverance till we come to that pinch wherein we cry, Up, 'Lord, how long,' &c., as Paul saith of himself, 'We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we might not trust in ourselves, but in God which quickeneth the dead,' 2 Cor. i. 9. The Lord brought him out of hope of life, that he might be humbled, and learn to know where only life, help, and comfort in all extremities is to be found.

(3.) Thirdly, *To quicken our appetite.* God puts us off the longer ; we are unwise and think he doth it to put us off for ever ; in which manner of working the Lord in a manner fisheth for us. The fisher, we know, doth draw back the hook when he finds the fish is like to bite, that the fish may follow. So God gives back from our suits sometimes, not to make us give over, but that we may press him so much the more. The experience hereof once found is very sweet, though smarting in the beginning, as we may see in the spouse : Cant. v. 2, 'She slept, and lost Christ by her sluggishness.' She made some idle excuses not to open unto him. Well, what came of it ? When she would have opened to her best beloved her hands dropped myrrh ; all her affection was not gone, for he had left so much with her as made her in love with him, but her beloved had withdrawn himself. Well, yet more. In search of him the watchmen 'beat her, wounded her, took away her veil.' Here she pays worthily for her sloth ; she had all sweet words given her to open unto Christ : 'Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled ;' but putting him off, as I have shewed, he departs and leaves her in the pursuit of him. And why goes he away ? Partly to chastise her neglect of him, to whom she should have gone out, and opened with all cheerfulness and diligence ; and partly it was to quicken on her desires, as we see it fell out, ver. 8, wherein she chargeth the daughters of Jerusalem, that if they find her beloved, to tell him that she was sick of love.

(4.) Fourthly, He delays and puts off our suits, *to enhance the price of those things he gives* ; for what lightly comes, for the most part, as the proverb is, lightly goes ; but what we come hardly by, that we highly prize, and have in estimation, as we see in the chief captain, Acts xxii. 28, when Paul had pleaded he was a Roman, he replied, 'With a great sum obtained I this freedom ;' he bought it at a dear rate, and therefore he valued it highly. So if the things of God did not cost us sighs, tears, weepings, lamentations, watchings, strivings, earnest longings, and many prayers, we would think them easy, to be got at our pleasure, and so despise, contemn, or let them lightly pass as they came. God therefore, to enhance the price, doth keep them off till the bell ring, that we may know the rich value of these his commodities. All this is for the time.

III. The third circumstance is, *the means and way.* Here is all the strife. God would have it his way, and we would have it our way. Oh, saith Naaman, 2 Kings v. 11, 'Behold, I thought he would surely come out to me, and stand, and call upon the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper.' But the Lord will not be tied to the means. When we see God, and fit means for effecting

of such and such a thing, if then we grow secure therein, and think this is good, this is surely the way, and this will do it, herein we fail, because we see that alone, and do not principally and first of all see and seek unto God; and therefore in this case, because of our idolatrous conceit in lifting up the means beyond their places, God is forced many times to dash the means in pieces, and help us by some other way, of all others least expected, as we may see how God ordered the matter in Paul's shipwreck, Acts xxvii. 22. God did give unto him his own life, and the lives of all that were in the ship with him, but withal the ship must perish. A strange manner of deliverance! How should they then be saved, this being in all appearance the only means of safety? By the wreck of the ship God did perform his promise, some by swimming, the rest on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship, all got on land; and even so, I say, we many times escape on boards, and broken pieces of a ship; I mean those means we least thought of, or least trusted unto, because we should not set up unto ourselves so many gods before us. Again, we may remember, Gen. xxxix., when Joseph was advanced into Potiphar's house, a great man and a prince of the state, then he might have thought he was likely now to rise, and that the accomplishments of his dreams were in fair way to speed; but this proved not the means. He becometh his enemy, and causeth him to be cast in a dungeon. Well, next a butler is made his friend by expounding of his dream; and now Joseph had good hope the butler would be a means of his enlargement, and no question he prayed also for good success, but God would not bless the same, because he will not have our means, and that we rest upon to speed. But at last God's means brings him out: Pharaoh dreams, is vexed, the butler then remembers; thus came his honour.

In France, the time was when their persecution was great, and their fears many; then they did trust on the king of Navarre, Oh what great matters he would do; but he failed them at their need. God indeed paid him home for disappointing the prayers and hopes of his people. Why did God suffer this? We may imagine this as a main cause, lest they should too much exalt the means, and say, the king of Navarre, the king of Navarre, the prince of Conde hath done this (*b*). God did cashier them, and set up another means of his praise. Judges vii., Gideon's army likewise is brought from thirty-two thousand to one thousand, and yet the Lord says they are too many, he will save Israel by three hundred only. Why? Lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, 'My own hand hath saved me.' He knows how ready we are to attribute and sacrifice the fat of the offering unto man, and set up the means, forgetting him, the author and fountain of all the good things we enjoy; in all which and the like is verified, that which Saint Paul speaks, 1 Cor. i. 27, 'God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty; and base things and naught, and things that are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence; but all the praise be of him, and to him.'

These are the causes why God doth answer our prayers so often by those means we do not trust unto. If we send in a message at one door, what if we go about to another for an answer; let him appoint the means, and thy deliverance shall be so much the more speedy and comfortable. Many want comfort long for this cause, that they appoint unto themselves such and such means thereof. In afflictions, you shall have some say, Oh if I

might speak with such and such a man I should be satisfied, he would ease my mind, when in the mean time, with this there is a sinful neglect of other men's ministry nearer, whose help we are bound to require. In this too much doating on the means, if we profit not, and our prayers remain unanswered, in this case, let us blame ourselves, who have prescribed him how to do his own work.

IV. The fourth circumstance is, *the limitation of the manner of granting.*

We must distinguish of this,

(1.) *First, God will not be tied to the manner.* Sometimes when we ask, God doth give just the same we ask for, as 1 Sam. i. 11, Hannah prayed for a man-child unto the Lord, and she was heard, obtaining Samuel. If not so, yet then the Lord may answer us in value, though not in kind, giving us as good as we have desired. This is all one, if one pay us a sum in silver, do we ask him why it is not in gold? Moses, he desired to see the land of Canaan, God brought him not in thither, but yet he shews him it, Deut. xxxii, from the top of mount Nebo, whence he saw more of it by probability than he could have seen in any place of the land. He had his desire in value, though not in kind. So 2 Cor. xii. 7, alluding to Judges ii. 3, where it is said the Canaanites should be as thorns in their sides. A thorn in the flesh was sent to buffet St Paul, called the messenger of Satan, against which he prayed and prayed again (for nothing doth more grieve the child of God than to be humbled and buffeted with base temptations), but it was not removed. God's answer was, 'My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.' Paul had it in value though not in kind. So many times our prayers are heard when we least think and perceive the same, and the good we desire done us, as it were, against our will. As apothecaries and surgeons use to deal with us, so many times God deals with men; when the plaster smart, men cry to take it off, when in the mean time, by holding it on, the cure is done; and so it is with us, we cry out unto God to take away this pain, that he would pull away such a plaster, such a corrosive from us. Why? Oh, say they, that we may serve him better, and yield him more obedience, when indeed, with holding thee to it, and by binding, as it were, this cross fast upon thee, the very same thing God worketh in thee.

(2.) Again, in prayer, you shall have *many complaints of some*. Oh that I had more life! oh that I had more sense and feeling! oh that this lumpish heaviness were removed! when indeed the holding them off and delaying them in this suit is the highway to help them to their suit.

(3.) Finally, When God hears us not in any of the foresaid ways, yet in effect he shews *we have sometimes far better things than we desired*, as we see his promise is, Isaiah lx. 17, 'For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver,' &c. Thus, many times when we pray for brass, iron, wood, and stones, we have gold, silver, brass, and iron in place of them; for when men labour in prayer, and have not the same things they have willed and asked for, God makes it up better another way. A man perhaps suffers poverty, loss, or wreck at sea, and is now driven nearer unto God by prayer, hath a more plentiful measure of the Spirit poured upon him, learns now to depend upon God, and know what true riches is: this man, if he could value grace, is a hundred times richer than before, having his eyes open to see afar off into things invisible. In this case, a man may come to complain, I have prayed thus and thus long, yet my prayers are not heard, yet this and this cross lies heavy upon me. But look if thou hast gotten patience, and canst see that God hath sent this upon thee; look

if God have thereby driven thee off, and weaned thee from the world, and hath let in the oil of grace into thy heart, so as now thou art a new man, having thy conversation more in heaven than ever, remember in this, thy prayers are not lost, but double paid, and I hope there is no cause to complain when the payment is so good. Thus all God's promises, like rivers perpetuated, ending in the sea, do end in heaven, and to this tend all the comforts, promises, threatenings, and crosses to bring us thither. Unto all these I might also add this, that sometimes our prayers are not heard for others, when yet the reflex of that good we wish thee* comes upon ourselves, so that they are not lost; as we may see in the mission of the apostles, Mat. x. 13, they are willed in whatsoever house they come, to salute it, and if the house be worthy, that their peace be upon it. If there be a son of peace there, that peace be upon him, otherwise, our Lord saith, 'let your peace return to you.'

V. The last circumstance is, *the measure of proportion*. He hath set forth to no man any proportion of the things promised. To one he gives five talents, to another but one. Must every one have as much faith, hope, love, humility, honour, riches, and other qualities as others? Where then is that order which God hath appointed, to give the greatest and most eminent graces unto those he hath fitted for the greatest works and places. He gives thee not so much grace as another, because he hath not so much work for thee to do as for him unto others, or there is not so great trials and temptations appointed for thee to buckle with as is for such a one. It is a wonder to see how restless a great many are when they see others outstrip them in grace. They think nothing of that they have; unless they could pray as well as such a one and such a one, then all were well; but I say unto thee, content thyself if thou have any portion of grace, and be thankful for it. If God will open his hand in the use of the means, and give thee an increase, receive it joyfully; but fret not with thyself, or quarrel with him; if he keep thee of thy small measure, it shall serve thy turn to salvation as well as the greatest if he will give thee no more. Even as it was in the gathering of manna, Exod. xvi., he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little at the meeting† had no lack; so he that hath most grace, it shall bring him but to heaven, and thy small measure shall lead thee thither also. Say not, Oh I shall never come thither unless I have such and such a measure of grace, and can do as such and such a one. What if thy God will have thee contented with a little? His allowance shall suffice, the least measure shall bring us home. If in this case thou pray long and he hear thee not, blame thyself, striving thus to be thine own carver, not contented with allowance.

So there is a measure of the dispensation of things, as I touched before. He hears us going on in a course and trade of prayer, his grant includes a continual trading; as rain comes not all at once, but by degrees, that we might still have dependence for more, so God will give grace but by little and little, so as we shall still through the course of our life have cause to depend upon him and pray for increase. Thus, and many other ways, our Lord's promise is most sure. It stands always good. 'Ask, and you shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.' If the fault be not in ourselves, prayer shall bring down a blessing at one time or other, and we shall find the effect and fruit of it.

Now I come to the reasons, which are two: first, 'every one that asketh

* Qu. 'them'?—Ed.

† Qu. 'meting'? that is, 'measuring.'—Ed.

receiveth;' as if he should say, for the Lord exempts no man that doth not disable himself. This promise, we must understand, is not a thing chained to some function, as most promises are, but this is as the Lord's common. All must and may pray, and are heard, always reserved the former exceptions.

The second is taken from fatherly compassion, so raising us up unto God, in and from whence these small streams we have flow, being much more abundantly merciful than any bowels of compassion which may be in us. '

But chiefly I would have you consider how here in this place our Lord doth press this matter again and again, assuring us we shall be heard in our prayer, of purpose, as it were, to hold up our heads above water, which in this our weary journey are so ready to sink. One would have thought this a very large charter, 'Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you;' and yet because he knew the difficulty of the same as well as the necessity, that it is a hard and a great task to pray in faith aright, and yet a thing absolutely needful, he follows it therefore, and presseth it home with several supporting arguments, which, God willing, we shall come to in their places.

First, we must consider of *the necessity of faith in prayer*. For he that comes to God must believe that he is a 'rewarder of them that diligently seek him,' Heb. xi. 6; and St James shews us, that he who asks must ask in faith, or else we speed not, James v. 15. Thus Jehoshaphat encourageth his fearful army to believe in God, but first he was encouraged himself. It was told him, and he told it them, that they should not need to fear; God was on their side, he would fight for them; and yet after this, Jehoshaphat shews how they must come by this deliverance: 'Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper,' 2 Chron. xx. 20.

Brethren, it is true, the glory of God is put into our hands, as it were, to extend the same in obedience to every precept we are enjoined to observe; that so others, 'seeing our good works, may glorify our heavenly Father.' But most of all in believing we glorify him, and set forth his praises, because hereby we seal unto the truth of all the rest; where by the contrary, if we believe him not, it is the greatest dishonour and disgrace that may be; yea, John saith, 'Such a one hath made God a liar,' 1 John v. 10. Will you see an instance, how heinous this sin was in one of the best saints, in whom frailty no question for our comfort was suffered? Moses, Num. xx. 10-12, was bidden to speak to the rock, that water might come forth to that murmuring multitude; but in anger he smites twice on the same, uttering these words, 'Hear now, ye rebels, must *we* fetch ye water out of this rock,' as though if it came not, he was excused; and if it came, so, there it was. But for this, we know, he was not suffered to enter into the land of Canaan. We must trade in faith in all our actions, or we shall suffer loss in all; when by the contrary, if we go on in this, we shall have mercy unto mercy.

We read, Acts xiv. 9, that Paul, as he preached at Lystra, seeing an impotent cripple look on him stedfastly, in whom he saw faith to be healed, that by and by he made him stand up, and cured him; this was bred, no question, in him by the Spirit of God, but the special means thereof was his attending on the word preached. This attention, prizing, and valuing of the word, is a near way unto it; when by the contrary, the infidelity of men doth, as it were, bar up the way against themselves, that the power

of the Spirit is not so lively in working amongst them : as we see Christ says of those he conversed amongst, that because of their unbelief, he could not do any great works amongst them ; the infidelity of these, as it were, hindering him, bound his hands in a manner, they being incapable thereof. Lo ! what a necessity there is of faith in prayer, and how loathsome that stain of infidelity is ! If our faith fall, all doth fall to the ground ; if this abide, all goes well. Wherefore, as in war men take others' bonds and promises without further specialties, so do thou with thy God ; take his bond, and go boldly unto him : believe his promise ; there is a necessity thereof, it stands thee on thy life so to do.

Secondly, *for the difficulty of prayer with faith* ; our Lord saw that there was no work more difficult to be done, and therefore he so presseth it with arguments.

The causes of the difficulty of prayer I take to be these :—

(1.) First, Because our profaneness and natural corruptions do most shew themselves in this action. Hence herein are those many and often complaints of our deadness, dullness, and hardness of heart in prayer, and of those world of things which violently, we know not whence, and suddenly thrust themselves into our minds. The devil helps also, and thrusts on, incensing* our corruptions.

(2.) Besides, this puts us down and out of heart from praying with assurance to be heard. The conscience of guiltiness gives stabs to our prayers. In this combat, the Egyptian or Israelite must die. If a man let loose himself to some gross sin, he shall be sure to find it in his prayer, sometimes to terrify him ; sometimes to deaden his spirits, to weaken his faith ; yea, at the best he shall be found not to pray with any life : as Mr Perkins tells us of a man who had stolen a sheep, who for all this, though he went on in his devotions, found no rest until he had confessed the same ; till then the beast was ever in his way (c). Yea more, what checks and reproaches are then in the heart, sent close home by the accusing conscience ! As, what ! Wilt thou go unto God, and think to be heard ; thou, so wretched and profane a creature ; thou, that hast so often broken thy vows and promises ; thou, that knowest so much of thy master's will, and doest so little ; thou, that hast sinned against conscience and knowledge ; that art so soiled and defiled with wallowing in the mire of sin ?

Thus, though a man have prayed earnestly and often, it is not an easy matter to wash off the stain of sin, and quiet the conscience. As after a storm on the sea, though the tempest be gone, yet there is not by and by a calm, there will be a rolling and tossing of the waves up and down a long while after ; so, to believe that God will hear our prayers, and that he hath done away all our sins out of his sight, it is not by and by done, there is a rolling and a stain of sin, that will toss up and down a long time after our prayers are done. Will you see the proof of this in one of the best saints, who was tossed thus for our comfort ? The prophet David, after his great sin, and that he had confessed the same, 2 Sam. xii. 13, he had an absolution pronounced unto him by the prophet Nathan : 'The Lord also hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die.' What could be more, and what now may hinder his joy ? 'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered,' Ps. xxxii. 1. But yet you see how the waves roll, and are troubled, though the storm be over ; as Ps. li., how is he vexed ! how earnestly doth he pray for mercy !—that 'his iniquities might be blotted out ;' that his sin might 'be cleansed ;' that he might 'hear

* That is, 'inflaming.'—G.

the voice of joy and gladness ;' that 'the bones which he had broken might rejoice ;' that God would not 'cast him from his presence, nor take his Spirit from him ;' that he would 'restore unto him the joy of his salvation,' &c.

What was the cause of all this stir ?

(1.) The filthiness of sin discovered, the Majesty offended, the punishment due, the scandal which came to others, to the dishonour of God by the party offending, together with the odious stain and filth which that sin left behind upon the soul, was such, that the greenness and yet smarting of the wound did not suffer him thoroughly to apprehend and fetch home the consolation. As we see, if a wound be raw, though suppling oil be brought unto it, and though it be applied with a light hand, which is commendable in that art, yet being touched, because of that rawness it smarts still ; so the conscience being wounded, and the sore raw still, sin appearing like a monster in his colours, the punishment due apprehended, and the bitter belches thereof yet arising, though the comforts of God be like suppling oil applied by the hand of the skilful surgeon, to allay and cure the same, yet the comforts not being digested, nor able so soon to expel the former impressions, the Spirit being but raw in them, and the conscience of their own unworthiness being great, no comfort can fasten, but many fears remain in them for a long time.

(3.) Thirdly, Because there is a marvellous ignorance in us of the nature and dealing of God ; not that we can be altogether ignorant of him, who is so glorious in all his creatures, filling heaven and earth with the majesty of his glory, yea, and is so good unto us ; but as it is one thing to give rules of war, and another to practise the rules, so it is one thing to speak of God bravely, and another thing to practise those things we know and speak of. For when we have need to ask and beg of God those great and rich mercies to salvation, which should support and help us in all storms, diving into the use and depth of his attributes, in place thereof we draw unto ourselves a narrow scantling,* and false image of God, judging of him not as he is, but as we conceive him to be, like one of us. Which we see the Lord reproves, Isa. lv. 7 : there God saith, 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy on him ; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.' And then it follows : 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.' Is there sense in this ? Dost thou ask what the sense is ? As if he should say, alluding to thy senseless ignorant objections, What man could pass by these and these things ! what father could pass by these offences in his child ! how then shall I look for pardon of God ? Unto this he answers, Measure not my working by scantling* the same after the proportion of any creature, or anything in his imagination, unless, I say, he have had his light from God, for my mercy outstrips all your conceits. Hence our prayers are weak and cold, because we make false images of God. But this point I shall meet with anon, therefore I let it pass.

(4.) Fourthly, Because we take a delay for a denial, and so are discouraged ; that if we be not heard by and by, we throw down our armour and run away, or sit still astonished, so disabling ourselves.

(5.) Fifthly, The hardness and difficulty of the things we pray for him-

* Cf. note a, Vol. I. page 117.—G.

ders our prayers; as John xi. 38, when Christ came to Lazarus's grave, and called to take away the stone, that he might raise him up, Martha cries out, 'Lord, by this time he stinketh, for he hath been dead four days.' This hinders our prayers, when we cry out it is too late, or the thing is so great, how can it be done? She was reprov'd, you know, and so must we be in this case. Another instance we have, 2 Kings vii., where, after Elisha had prophesied of that sudden plenty should be in the gate of Samaria after so great a famine, a lord, on whose hand the king leaned, answered the prophet, 'Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, could this thing be?' He had an answer suiting his unbelief, and lived to see his infidelity punished, being trodden under foot by the people in the gate, as they went forth into the forsaken camp of the Assyrians. So, I say, these and the like things stand in our way, because they seem hard to be done. As in the East India adventures, a time was when men were quick and ready to buy other men's shares, because the returns were good; but when the business went in show backwards, many have been as busy in selling their parts again (*d*). So we seem rather to go back than forward in our prayers, because of the difficulty of the things we pray for. We are ready to leave all, and sell our adventure.

(6.) Lastly, The sixth impediment is Satan's opposition to our prayers, which he labours by all means to interrupt. For it stands him on it to bestir himself to quench our faith if he can, because it gives vigour, force, and life to prayer. It troubles not the devil the saying of a thousand *Paternosters* and *Ave Marias* without faith. If a man know not what he says, or cares not whether he pray or no, all is one to him, if there be no faith in prayer. Satan knows if faith lay not hold on God, God does not lay hold on us, and therefore his policy is to deal with us as Scanderbeg is reported to have used his enemies in fight, still to aim at the general (*e*); or rather like that stratagem of the king of Syria, 2 Chron. xviii. 30, neither to fight against great or small, but against the king of Israel; so Satan's special charge is to fight against faith and prayer, the special man; the which his subtle and cruel dealing towards us is much like unto that tyranny Pharaoh used toward the children of Israel in Egypt, Exod. iii. 18; he put them into extreme toiling servitude to make brick; so he commanded to slay the children; but when none of these succeeded to his mind, he then determined to kill all. So, many times before prayer, the devil puts men to make brick, by filling their hearts with many cares or temptations, or by their own sins, deadness, dulness, hardness of heart, or other things to be done, with a world of discouraging, and confused thoughts of God,—his mercy, justice, and the like; and all this to keep a man from prayer. But if the mercy of God help a man through these difficulties, that because of the command of God, that knowledge he hath of his will, and his own necessities, he will yet break through all, and go to prayer, notwithstanding all impediments; then, in the next place, he labours to make us kill the children in the birth; that is, whenas our weaknesses, and many wants and imperfections that way, should be as fuel to our prayers, and inducements to make us hold on, and in reverence contain ourselves, still begging and waiting at the throne of grace for what we want or desire, he turns the same into horrors, fears, and flying away from God. Yet if this will not serve the turn, but that our God doth allure and draw us unto his presence again, and that we resolve to pray, though with many tremblings, fears, and weaknesses, because we know not whither to fly from his presence; then, when our prayers are done, and we have striven as we are

able, he persuades us to despair that our prayers are not heard, are nought, that our persons are abominable, that God loves us not, and that since Christ so turns us off still without comfort, we shall never, therefore, have any, &c.

The uses are,

Use 1. First, Against the profaneness of such persons who make a mock of prayer. But some may object there are none such. I wish there were not. But we know there are too many of this strain. I speak not of prayer established by law; none will, none dare meddle with that; it is dangerous. But for praying in houses, it is strange to see the profaneness in this kind. You shall have some say, Lo now these hypocrites; see what a stir they make; and he that doth keep some form of prayer in his own house constantly, though it may be but coldly done, yet he cannot escape, but is branded with the name of Puritan, when it may be, of all others, he least deserves it. But I will pass by this.

2. The second use is, *for reproof to such as think it an easy matter to pray.* Ask a beggar wandering through the country how he thinks to come to heaven, and he will answer, By my good prayers. So the dissolute and profane man, ask him how he thinks to come to heaven, he will say, By my good prayers. I confess, if you mean saying of a prayer, it is easy; but to pray aright, to pour out thy heart and soul before God, to believe he hears, and will come to help thee, to pray in faith, to rend thy heart before him, to lay hold of those things in him which are for thy humiliation and consolation, to wrestle with him, and strive for a blessing, to hope above hope, and, being delayed, to wait for him till he come, this is exceeding hard to be done. What then, profane man, hast thou not heard what is written? Zech. xii. 10, 'And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and supplication,' &c.; so, hast thou not read what is written? Ps. x. 17, 'Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble, thou wilt prepare their hearts,' &c. Hast thou not read what is written, Rom. viii. 16, 'Likewise the Spirit helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us, with groanings which cannot be uttered.' And dost thou, a lump of flesh, wallowing in thy sin, think to prevail by and bye in prayer? Those who are most forward thus in little esteeming and talking of prayer, many times are most to seek in sore and hard trials; as you shall have fencers, who make bravest flourishes when they play at blunt, are put most to their shifts when they come to the sharp (*f*); so, if such a one as I speak of fall into distress, he cannot draw out his sword, it rusts in the scabbard. It is a wonder to see grave and wise men to come so far short of this, that in the sorrows and discomforts of themselves or others, they cannot pray; a minister must be sent for to say somewhat unto them; they cannot themselves pray. I deny not but that God's dear children may be driven to this need upon divers occasions of sickness, sorrows, and temptations, to crave the help of others, that they may be humbled. Neither deny I but that book prayers may be good and profitable, and that there is a good and holy use of them, in which all our necessities may be included, if they be well and rightly penned; but yet for all this, it is a shame for men to be so ignorant that they cannot tell their mind to God in prayer, and plead for themselves and others in necessity, being more unfit to pray than David was to march in Saul's armour.

3. The third use is *for comfort.* To whom? To such as are good in

prayer, and yet are out of heart with their prayers. I would have such see how Jacob wrestled, wept, and prevailed with God in prayer. In some sort we must be contented to go away halting; there will be defects and imperfections in our best prayers, do what we can. 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh,' and will be so; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit,' John iii. 6. You shall have those who are fullest of grace most complain, like rich men whining most when their bags are fullest, you shall have them complain, Lord, help me, I cannot pray; what shall I do? It is all to no purpose; better leave than go on in such a formal course. I am worse and worse. Surely, if I could pray aright, I should speed better. But I ask thee how? Dost thou not pray at all? Yes, will they say, I pray, but I pray not as I should, with faith, fervency, constancy, and feeling. I faint, and am discouraged in my journey. Hear me; thou seest a man go under a great burden, and perhaps so sinking under the same, that he must stoop and rest him often; and yet thou pitiest him, and thinkest for all this that he carrieth this burden, though he rest himself. So may it be with thee in prayer, seeing it is one of the hardest tasks of the world to pray with faith and feeling. If in this thou find stops and failings, be not discouraged; thou seest what a hard thing it is [to] go upright under so great a burden. Yet be not out of heart, though thou must sit down by the way; but know thy striving and endeavour shall bring thee through at the last. The bringing forth of a right prayer through so many oppositions, it is in a manner like the bringing forth of a child, in which there is much pain, anguish, and sorrow; so that we had rather do anything else; but when the child is born, then there is joy. Though with the remembrance of the throes of prayer thou art astonished, be comforted in this, the work is done, and thou hast made thy prayers known; the issue at one time or other shall be comfortable.

4. The fourth use is *for advice*. If the Lord have given us liberty at any time this way, that our hearts have been opened and enlarged, our faith strengthened, our eyes cleared, our consciences eased, so that our confessions have been large, bless God for this, and reckon it a most singular mercy. We fail all herein for want of thanksgiving. We can complain in wants, strivings, deadness, and senseless hardness. Oh my wants! Oh my ignorance! Oh my blockishness! Oh my hardness of heart! Oh my infidelity! But when our suit is granted, where is our thanksgiving? If thou bring forth a right prayer, let God have a sacrifice. It is a great matter.

5. A fifth use is, *for exhortation, to set on prayer as a work of great difficulty*. We must learn to whet and sharpen our tools first. As the prophet David out of meditations thus made prayers, thus must we prepare matter ere we pray. As the blood runs to the veins from the liver, made of the best and purest food concocted and digested; so we should prepare and digest fit matter, and not set on the same rashly and unpreparedly, as some think they may. Hear me: What will not men do in great important matters to compass them? So doth it much behove thee to consider what may humble thee, what may raise thee, what may encourage thee, and draw thee on before thy God, that thou mayest in thy distress make a right and proper use of the nature of God, and all these excellent things considerable in him. When we set on it slightly, it is no marvel though our return of consolation be of the same stamp. So in our general prayers we should have a fellow-feeling to set on edge our desires; but specially if we would be men of prayer. Christ would have set our faith on work

that this might fly to heaven, to fetch from thence whatsoever is good for us. Now in this case it is a marvellous cunning to dung our faith, as men dung the root of a tree to make it fruitful; though I confess somewhat else is to be done to the body, as the pruning and lopping of the branches, such as the increasing and scouring of our hope and love, with other graces, by the Spirit, which, as it hath an office in the branches, so doth it also descend into the root and help us there; so that the root of all prayer is the Spirit, but the root to thee is faith.

Now by what means should this be done, to dung our faith?

As in war they use a double help for their further security and strength.

1. The main;

2. The auxiliary helps;

So is it with our faith. The helps are divers.

(1.) First, *To labour to know and make clear our title to God, as a Father*: which is here implied: 'How much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask them?' To this, two main things belong: first, to consider the right how we come to this title? Only by faith in the Son of God: as it is John i. 12, 'But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.' Nothing can make them become the sons of God, but by faith in the Son of God. To clear this, it must be by the sign as well as by the cause. The apostle tells us, Gal. iv. 6, 'And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.' Dost thou think thyself now in a blessed estate? Art thou one of the sons of God—for all his children are sons and daughters by adoption? Dost thou say thou art one of his sons and daughters? And dost thou say thou believest, being one with Christ, and so art justified by him? Take this also with thee; then he hath 'sent forth the Spirit of his Son into thy heart, to cleanse and sanctify thee: and hereby,' saith the apostle, 1 John iii. 24, 'we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.' If we make claim to justification, and omit sanctification: if no Spirit, we have no title of sons; for we know the same apostle saith, 'Whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him; neither can he sin, because he is born of God,' 1 John iii. 9.

(2.) Next, *To be careful to keep the evidences of our adoption always in repair*: I mean that we keep those graces which build us up hereunto, as fresh and flourishing as may be, that we read them fair in the time of trial. A man that in the country lays up his deeds and writings in the smoke, may find them so eaten and darkened, that when he should use them they cannot be read; so I doubt many of our evidences are smoky, and so blotted, that in our need we cannot read them. Our care hath not been to lay them up safe, and keep them in repair, by which it comes to pass that now we are to seek in those things which belong to our peace.

(3.) Lastly, as it is in Col. iii. 17, 'Whatsoever we do in word or in deed, we do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.' We do no honour to God, but through Christ; and so in the particular of our prayers we have the less joy, living in discouragements, not giving the beginning of all unto him, and the riches of his grace. When because we have nothing of our own to put in, whereupon we may build and rely, we go away heartless and discouraged, as though we should not be so bad, but somewhat should be in us to procure his mercy, never all this while having sufficiently seen our nakedness, that

there is nothing in us, and that we must be covered altogether, and wholly in his presence, that no filthiness be discovered. We read, Exod. xxviii. 42, that the high priest going about his sacrifice must have on his linen breeches, from the loins even unto his thighs, that he might not bear iniquity, and die, discovering his nakedness. What! Such a high priest? so holy, so gloriously attired, so covered with rich robes? yet he shall die for all this if he want his linen breeches. I fear many of us come thus to God, not having soundly seen our own nakedness, and where only all our comfort is to be found. The apostle, 1 Cor. iii. 21, says, 'Therefore let no man glory in men: for all things are yours;' to wit, with the former limitations, to do us good. 'All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, things present or things to come, all are yours:' but a man's title must be in Christ: for it follows, 'And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.' So Rom. viii. 32, the apostle's argument is, 'He that spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things?' If Christ be once given thee, Christ is more than heaven, and earth, and all; if he be given, God will deny thee nothing.

The auxiliary helps are as foreign soil to barren grounds, marl, lime, and the like, which make fruitful; and herein consider these things,

(1.) *The general graciousness of God to all his creatures.* This is a great help that he feeds the young ravens; yea, as it is Mat. vi. 26, that he feedeth all the fowls of the air. Whence from his general goodness the inference is, 'Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?' The consideration of his graciousness unto all the sons of men, and especially to many evil men, when they have called upon him, of which God hath shewed us many instances that they have been heard, should make us not keep off, but hope to speed well; yea, and in this also to consider the graciousness of God in receiving great sinners unto mercy, which the prophet, admiring, thus speaks of: Micah vii. 18, 'Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgressions of the remnant of his inheritance? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy,' &c. I doubt many wrong themselves in this, because they erect before them a false image of God. If one should see a picture of God before him, as the papists do make him, like an old man with a cloak and a staff, and a great many about falling down before him, frowning on some, beating of others, kicking of others away, what an absurd thing would we think this (*g*)! What difference is there betwixt a false picture and a false image of God in thy heart? When thou canst not conceive of him but as terrible and incensed against thee, assure thyself, thou dost not prostrate thyself with right thoughts before him, if being a sinner thou thinkest he will smite thee down.

(2.) Secondly, *His all-sufficiency and omnipotency*, being in heaven above, and overruling all, who is excellent in knowledge, wonderful in working, all-sufficient to save, and powerful to put down the mighty from their seats, and to exalt the humble. He is beyond all fathers. They see but a little, they are not always present, they are not always able to help when they would, but he doth see thee at all times, is ever present, and able to help thee in all distresses; he is greater than all in breadth, in depth, in height, in length, in mercy, in power, as being in heaven above all; fathers are not so. These be two special helps.

(3.) Thirdly, *The promises, the faithfulness of God.* The precedents of

them in former times to thyself, or others. As Ps. lxxvii. 5, David was in great and sore distress, yet, saith he, 'I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times,' &c. And in another place the church pleads, 'Our fathers trusted in thee, and were delivered;' and so from thence raiseth a ground of confidence. Thus the prophet David he reasons the matter with Saul, when he was to go forth and fight with that great and terrible Philistine: 1 Sam. xvii. 34, 'Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock; and I went out after him, and delivered it out of his mouth; and when he arose against me, I caught him by the beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them.' The danger was now the same, wherefore having the like faith and protection, he looks for the like deliverance. So look what experience thou hast had of that which God hath done for thee, and make thy advantage thereof. Withal remember how even good men, where they have been bountiful, delight to give more and more still. Though it be not so always with men, yet it is so always with God; if once he have heard thee in mercy, he will hear thee always.

(4.) The last and principal one for this purpose, is that which lieth in the text, the first main reason which now fitly proffers itself, *the universality of the grant*, which is as a common, every commoner having interest therein, some more, and some less, yet all have interest less or more. As princes have masters of requests, who as grand officers have access unto them at all times, and are familiars, yet every man may deliver a petition to the king. Abraham we know was a holy man, and the friend of God; others there be inferior. Saint James wills those who are sick to send for the elders of the church, that they may pray over them, &c., James v. 14. Thus though all be not officers, yet all men have an universality of the grant: 'Every one that asketh, receiveth.'

Some may here object, What is that to me? I am not in the covenant. I answer, If thou be an outlaw, get thee in as soon as thou canst; but if thou art such an one that art not outlawed, then thou hast a title in the common, do as thou canst in carrying thyself as a commoner. Let us remember in the common cause we have need to be ready with our help, as we would be glad of help in the like case. In this let us ask ourselves, What have we done for others with our prayers? What for the church at home and abroad? It shall lie heavy upon us if we shall omit to help them now with our prayers at their need. In the city, when men have entered freemen, they use to pay scot and lot (*h*); so in Christianity, if we be entered as freemen, where is our scot and lot? Where are our prayers offered up for king, our country, for religion, against masses, the sins of the time, the judgments threatened, and the like?

Here some may object, and say, Alas! I am a poor servant, I cannot pray, let others pray that can; I am a poor ignorant man, with such like.

I answer, What if thou be! Thou art a citizen in Christianity; thou must pay scot and lot. How do men strive with their landlords for their commons? They will raise a mutiny, do anything, keep somewhat on it for possession's sake, rather than lose it, if it were but to keep one poor cow upon it. So, whatever thou be, maintain thy title in this common, do somewhat for it.

The last argument is taken from the lesser to the greater, from fathers on earth, declaring that if so much mercy, pity, affection, may be, and is in them to their children, how much more pity, love, mercy, and the like

may we expect from our heavenly Father. I will go over but a few of these things, and so make an end, wherein I will not dispute all things, how fathers do and should do to their children, but limit myself within the compass of two examples only.

1. Of a good father to an ill son.
2. Of a good father to a good son.

1. That of 2 Sam. xviii. 33 shall be the first, where when Absalom had rebelled against his father, cast him out of the kingdom, abused his concubines, and was in pursuit of him for his life, yet when that battle was lost, wherein his son died, and the victory now on his side, how doth the king mourn, as though all had been lost! and though he was a magnanimous king, yet this made way to his passion, so that he went up and down weeping and crying, 'O Absalom, my son, my son Absalom, would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son!' Oh the love of a father to his son!

2. The second is that of Jacob, who when he had thought Joseph had been dead, it is said he rent his clothes, put on sackcloth, mourned for his death many days, which sorrow was so great, that when all his sons and daughters rose up to comfort him, he refused to be comforted, but said, 'I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning,' Gen. xxxvii. 35. So Gen. xlv. 30, when Benjamin was like to have been stayed prisoner by Joseph behind the rest, with what earnest affection doth Judah plead for his enlargement many ways! amongst which this was the chief, that Jacob's life was bound up in the life of his children.

Now, it is to be considered, that though fathers be thus good, yet some may fail; but the thing is, they know how to be good, and are so ordinarily, unless it be when some, like monsters, prove unnatural in distemper of temptation, necessity, or some other sinister way. This dear affection the Lord excellently shews us, Isa. xlix. 15, 'Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, but I will never forget thee.' A father may prove unnatural to a son in a fit of temptation and distemperature, as Saul, who threw a javelin at his son Jonathan; sometimes necessity will cause unnaturalness, as 2 Kings vi. 28, in those women who consented to see their sons, one of them complaining to the king that she had done so, but the other would not. A miserable complaint, and most woeful misery, to hear of a woman who had buried her son in her own bowels. But this is rare and not usual. So a father may forget himself, and pass all affection in jealousy, as that Turk who made one strangle his own son out of a conceit he was too well beloved of his subjects. Thus with many the like occasions, parents may become churlish and unnatural to their children; but still this stands firm, they know at least how to be kind unto them. Our Lord would have us learn from hence, that he can do much more, and far surpasseth them all in whatsoever kindness can or may be in them.

See this last help to stay up our hands, to wit, that little picture of the great God in the dearness of affection which he hath placed in parents. If thou be a father or a mother, thou knowest it; but no man can know it but a father or a mother. Also, hast thou not seen what affection may be in a son to the father? As we read of the son of Croesus, who, though he were dumb, yet when he saw the murderers to come in, who were ready to kill his father, violence of affection suddenly burst forth into these words, as the story shews, 'Oh, spare my father!' (i). If so much may be in a son unto thee, how much more may be in thy God for thee?

Now for all this, thou art afraid of thy imperfections, weaknesses, and manifold infirmities, that these shall stay good things from thee; and therefore thou criest out, Oh my prayers are lost, they are to no purpose! oh my sins, weaknesses, and infirmities, these stop the way to my prayers! What, man! Hast thou a son, and perhaps he marries without thy permission, or doth some other shrewd* turn, which grieves and vexeth thy spirit, and this child, perhaps, comes home wounded unto thee, with blood about his ears, and so falls down before thee, freely confessing his wandering and misdemeanours, and prays for thy favour and forgiveness; tell me, wouldst thou not embrace him, and cry out, 'Oh my son, my son!' all the rest should be forgotten and forgiven? What then, O man, thinkest thou of thy God, when thou sayest thou canst have no comfort in prayer? Thou beest, what wilt thou make of thy God? What! is he a God of cruelty, anger, and revenge only? No, no; in this case thou feignest unto thyself false and abominable conceits of God, and thence the returns of thy comforts are answerable unto thy wretched fancies. But if ever he hath turned thy heart unto him, and dealt graciously with thee, or hath allured thee unto him by his graciousness and kind dealing with others; or if thou findest in thyself how much thou canst pass by in thy child, though there be many great faults and omissions, make thy advantage of this, and go unto thy God; whatsoever thy case be, thou shalt find him more exceeding merciful, as the church doth, Micah vii. 9, and therefore she comes to triumph: ver. 18, 'Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgressions of the remnant of his inheritance? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again,' &c.

We are all much to blame in this, even those who have the greatest measures of grace, that we do not aright make use of the nature of God. Sometimes melancholy, temptation, and want of judgment are causes of our error, wherein our understanding, fancy, and other powers of the soul are disordered, until light come in to dispel these clouds. It is strange to think that when we were enemies to God, with our backs to him in our natural blindness, and in sin running from him, then to think he should receive us, and now to stab us with our faces towards him in the state of reconciliation.

To conclude, if it be such a hard thing to pray so as to obtain, if we have need of such and so many helps to lift and hold up our very hands, which are ready to fall down, the Lord teach us to know our faults, and tell us what is yet further to be done, that we may learn to wrestle with God, and prevail in prayer! If we have been faulty in times past, let us mend; and among other things, now when the ark is like to be in danger, let us not prove injurious unto God in forsaking his cause. Hear me; hath God brought the church in divers places now into such dangers, yea, and some great ones also, environed with fears and crosses, and shall we now prove so injurious to God as to retire from them (at least not to have the benefit of our help and prayers)? Was it accounted such a foul offence to cause Uriah to be left in danger in the foremost rank, and then command that the troops should retire; and shall we not now be much more faulty to leave them in this danger? Let us aid them, then, with our prayers, until God, who is wonderful in working, and excellent in power, bring light from this darkness. We know not what the issue may be; but in

* Cf. our Glossary, *sub voce*.—G.

the mean time, if we pray, this remaineth always sure, that 'if we ask, we shall receive.' Our Lord hath said it; it is so, it must be so.

NOTES.

(a) P. 235.—'It was a rule in the ancient time, "Lay thy hand on the plough," &c. See note c to '*Divine Meditations*,' page 229.

(b) P. 238.—'The king of Navarre . . . the prince of Conde.' It is only necessary here to notice that Sibbes evidently sees the 'finger of God' in the murder of Henry by Ravallac. The apostasy of the great Huguenot points many 'a moral' to the Puritans. The services of Conde it were superfluous to annotate. He too was assassinated, by Montesquieu.

(c) P. 242.—'Mr Perkins tells us of a man, &c. Cf. our Memoir of Sibbes, Vol. I. pages xxxviii., xxxix. See the 'Cases of Conscience' of this fervid and searching old Divine for the above and many other similar quaint illustrations.

(d) P. 244.—'As in the East India adventures.' India was the *El Dorado* of the age of Sibbes; and every year witnessed some scheme of romantic adventure and fabulous promise. Our *speculation* is not so modern a thing as many deem.

(e) P. 244.—'Deal with us as Scanderbeg is reported.' This is the celebrated warrior-king of Albania, renowned in song and story. There are various early English books, contemporary with Sibbes, about him. Cf. Watt *sub voce*.

(f) P. 245.—'Fencers make bravest flourishes when they play at blunt.' That is, in sport, or for practice, not in earnest. The weapons, or 'swords,' are then 'covered,' or 'blunted.' Hence the technical phraseology 'blunt,' being a pointless rapier or foil to fence with.

(g) P. 248.—'If one should see a picture of God before him.' Such 'pictures' are not at all uncommon; for it is a popular mistake that only God the Son, and, as the 'dove' or 'radiance,' God the Spirit, are represented. In Genoa there is at this day a painting very much corresponding with Sibbes's description. If I remember aright it is by Pietro Perugino.

(h) P. 249.—'Scot and lot.' These are the dues to the lord of the manor for ingress and egress.

(i) P. 250.—'The son of Croesus.' . . . "Oh, spare my father." This touching and remarkable incident, which was the means of saving the life of Croesus, took place at the siege of Sardis. The beautiful narrative of Herodotus has made it immortal.

G.