

THE SAINT'S HAPPINESS.

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NOTE.

'The Saint's Happiness' forms one of the four 'Sermons' appended to 'The Saint's Comforts,' concerning which see Note, Vol. VI. page 160. Its title-page is given below.* Each of the four Sermons has separate pagination, but they do not appear to have been issued separately. G.

* THE
SAINTS
HAPPINESS :

Shewing mans Happi-
nesse is in Communion
with God.

With the meanes, and trialls
of our Communion with God,
being the substance of
divers Sermons.

By that Faithfull and Reve-
rend Divine, R. SIBBES, D.D.
and sometime Preacher to the Ho-
norable Societie of
Grayes-Inne.

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THE SAINT'S HAPPINESS.

But it is good for me to draw near to God.—Ps. LXXIII. 28.

THIS psalm is a psalm of Asaph, or of David, commended to Asaph, who was a seer and a singer. It represents one in a conflict afterward recovered, and in a triumphant conclusion. It begins abruptly, as if he had gained this truth : Say flesh and Satan what they can, yet this I am resolved of, I find God is yet good to Israel. Then he discovers what was the cause of this conflict. It was his weakness and doubt of God's promises in ver. 13, occasioned from the great prosperity that the wicked enjoyed, described from the 2d verse to the 13th. Then he sets down his recovery in the 17th verse. He went into the sanctuary, and saw what God meant to do with them at last. Then follows the accomplishment of the victory in the 23d verse. I am continually with thee. Thou hast holden me up. Thou wilt guide me now and bring me to glory. Therefore there is none in heaven but thee. Though nature may be surprised, yet God is my help ; and for the wicked, they shall perish ; nay, thou hast destroyed them. Therefore ' it is good for me to draw nigh to God.'

Now from that which hath been laid open we may observe,

Doct. First, *That God's dearest children are exercised with sharp conflicts in the faith of principles, yea, of God's providence.* This should comfort such as God suffers to cast forth mire and dirt of incredulity. It is the common case of God's dearest children, yea, of the prophets of God, David, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk, and therefore we ought not to be dejected too much ; and the rather because,—which also we may note in the second place,—

Doct. [Second,] *God's children, though they be thus low, yet they shall recover,* and after recovery comes a triumph. They may begin to slip a little, but still God's hand is under them, and his goodness ever lower than they can fall ; and this should teach us to discern of our estates aright, and to expect such conflicts, yet to know that still God's Spirit will not be wanting to check and repress such thoughts in the fittest time. Contrarily it is a principle to wicked men to doubt of God's providence, and therefore they suffer such temptations to doubt in them.

In the next place observe,

Doct. [Third,] *The way for a Christian to recover his ground in time of temptation, is for him to enter into God's sanctuary, and not to give liberty to his*

thoughts to range in, considering the present estate that he is in ; but look to former experiences, in himself, in others ; see the promises and apply them ; it shall go well with the righteous, but woe to the wicked, it shall not go well with them. This is to go into the sanctuary ; and happy man thou art, and in high favour, whom God admitteth so near to him. The world will tell thee of corn, and wine, and oil, and how great and glorious men are here ; but the sanctuary will shew thee they are set in slippery places. Carnal reason will tell thee God hath left the earth ; he sees not, he governs not, all are out of order. But the sanctuary will shew thee all things are beautiful in their time, Eccles. iii. 11. Mark the end of the righteous, Ps. xxxiii. 37. See Joseph, once a prisoner, after lord of Egypt ; Lazarus, once contemned and despised, after in Abraham's bosom ; Christ himself, once a rebuke and scorn of all on the cross, but now triumphing on 'the right hand of God, far above all principalities and power,' Eph. i. 21. All God's ways are mercy and truth, though we seem never so much forsaken for the present. Again, from David's observing the state of wicked men,—it is said, he saw the prosperity of wicked men,—we may gather,

Doct. [Fourth,] *Whether it be the eye of faith or the eye of sense, all serveth to bring us nearer to God.* God represents to the outward view of his children the example of his justice on others, to draw his children nearer home ; and it is one main reason why God suffers variety of conditions in men, that his children may gain experience from seeing their behaviour and by conversing with them.

Last of all, from the connection of this text with the former words, observe,

Doct. [Fifth,] *That the course of the children of God is a course contrary to the stream of the world.* 'They withdraw away from thee, and shall perish,' saith the prophet, but 'it is good for me to draw near ;' as if he had said, Let others take what course they will, it matters not much, I will look to myself, 'it is good for me to draw near to God ;' and the reason is,

Reason 1. *Because they are guided by the Spirit of God,* which is contrary to the world, and the Spirit teacheth them to see, not after the opinions of the world that is their best friend, but God is my best friend, that will never forsake me. 'Many walk that are enemies to the cross of Christ, but our conversation is in heaven,' Philip. iii. 18. And then a Christian hath experience of the ways of God, and by it he is every day settled in them ; by it he sees what the world works in others, and how God is opposite to them, and thereby he is made more zealous ; as in winter time the body is more hot within than in summer. And those that are well grounded grow more strong by opposition ; and however they may sometimes stagger, yet their motion is constant.

Use. If we will know our estates, *examine after what rule we lead our life, and what principles we follow.* If outward weights of the love of the world, self-love, or the like do move us, as clocks that go no longer than the weights hang on them, this shews that we are but actors of the life of a Christian, and that we are not naturally moved, that our nature is not changed, and that we are not made 'partakers of the divine nature,' 2 Peter i. 4 ; for then our motion would come from above : 'My life and flesh may fail, but thou, Lord, wilt never fail,' Ps. xl. 12. Therefore it is good for me to draw near to thee ; which words proceeding from an experimental trial of David, of the goodness and happiness of this nearness to God, afford us this consideration,

Doct. [Sixth,] *That God's Spirit enableth his children by experience to justify wisdom.* He suffers his children to meet with oppositions, that they may see they stand by an almighty power above their own, and above the power of their enemies. *Nihil tam certum est, quam quod post dubium certum est,* and therefore those that have felt the bitterness of their sins know how bitter it is; and those that have been overcome in temptations know their nature is weak, and those that have felt the unconstancy of the world, and the vanity of it, know it is a bitter thing to be far from God, and therefore they resolve, Hosea ii. 7, 'I will go to my first husband; for then it was better with me than now;' and as the prodigal, 'There is meat enough in my father's house, why then do I perish here with hunger?' Luke xv. 17; and therefore, if we will ever think to stand out resolutely in our courses against trials, we must labour for experience, and diligently observe God's dealings. It is experience that breedeth patience and hope. Experience of a truth seals a truth with a *probatum est*. And without it, the best and strongest judgments will in time of trial be ready to be jostled out of the maintenance thereof, and great professors will be ashamed of their good courses.

But to come to the particulars. 'It is good;' that is, it puts in us a blessed quality and disposition. It makes a man to be like God himself; and, secondly, 'it is good,' that is, it is comfortable; for it is the happiness of the creature to be near the Creator; it is beneficial and helpful.

'To draw near.' How can a man but be near to God, seeing he filleth heaven and earth: 'Whither shall I go from thy presence?' Ps. cxxxix. 7. He is present always in power and providence in all places, but graciously present with some by his Spirit, supporting, comforting, strengthening the heart of a good man. As the soul is said to be *tota in toto*, in several parts by several faculties, so God, present he is to all, but in a diverse manner. Now we are said to be near to God in divers degrees: *first*, when our *understanding is enlightened; intellectus est veritatis sponsa*; and so the young man speaking discreetly in things concerning God, is said not to be far from the kingdom of God, Mark xii. 34. *Secondly, in minding*; when God is present to our minds, so as the soul is said to be present to that which it mindeth; contrarily it is said of the wicked, that 'God is not in all their thoughts,' Ps. x. 4. *Thirdly*, when the *will upon the discovery of the understanding comes to choose the better part, and is drawn from that choice to cleave to him*, as it was said of Jonathan's heart, 'it was knit to David,' 1 Sam. xviii. 1. *Fourthly*, when *our whole affections are carried to God*, loving him as the chief good. Love is the first-born affection. That breeds desire of communion with God. Thence comes joy in him, so as the soul pants after God, 'as the hart after the water springs,' Ps. xlii. 1. *Fifthly*, and especially, *when the soul is touched with the Spirit of God working faith*, stirring up dependence, confidence, and trust on God. Hence ariseth sweet communion. The soul is never at rest till it rests on him. Then it is afraid to break with him or to displease him. But it groweth zealous and resolute, and hot in love, stiff in good cases; resolute against his enemies. And yet this is not all, for God will have also the outward man, so as the whole man must present itself before God in word, in sacraments; speak of him and to him with reverence, and yet with strength of affection mounting up in prayer, as in a fiery chariot; hear him speak to us; consulting with his oracles; fetching comforts against distresses, directions against maladies. *Sixthly*, and especially, we draw near to him *when we*

praise him ; for this is the work of the souls departed, and of the angels in heaven, that are continually near unto him. And thus much for the opening of the words. The prophet here saith, 'It is good for me.' How came he to know this ? Why, he had found it by experience, and by it he was thoroughly convinced of it ; so

Doct. [Seventh,] *Spiritual conviction is the ground of practice*; for naturally the will followeth the guidance of the understanding ; and when it is convicted* of the goodness of this or that thing, the will moveth toward it. Now there are four things that go to conviction : first, the understanding must be enlightened to see the truth of the thing, that there is such a thing, and that it is no fancy ; secondly, we must know it to be good, as the gospel is called the good word of God ; thirdly, that it is good for me ; and lastly, upon comparing all these together, it is the best for me of all, though other things seem to be good in their kind. A wicked man may be convinced that heaven and grace are good things ; but his corrupted affections persuade him it is better to live in pleasure and lust ; and when death comes then he may repent, for God is merciful. But a good man preferreth drawing near to God above all, and therefore we should labour for this conviction of our spirits. For it is not enough to hear, read, discourse, pray, but we must get the Spirit to set to his seal to all upon our hearts ; and this made Moses in sober balancing of things, choose rather to draw near to God and join with his afflicted brethren, than to be in honour in Pharaoh's court, to be the son of Pharaoh's daughter, or to enjoy the pleasures of sin, 'for he had respect to the reward,' Heb. xi. 25. He was convinced that there was more to be gotten with them than amongst the Egyptians. Thus Abraham came to forsake his country, and the disciples to forsake all and follow Christ. And undoubtedly the ground of all profaneness is from atheism that is within. Would the swearer trample upon the name of God, if he did believe and were convinced that he should not be guiltless ? Would the filthy person come near strange flesh, if he were persuaded that God would judge ? Would any wicked man change an eternal joy for a minute's pleasure, if he did believe the unrighteous should not inherit the kingdom of God ? Nay, the best have a remainder of this corruption of atheism. David : 'So foolish was I, and a beast,' Ps. lxxiii. 22. From hence come all sin against knowledge and conscience in men, whereof David complains : 'Keep me, that presumptuous sins prevail not over me, or get not dominion over me,' Ps. xix. 13. And for remedy against this vile corruption, there is no way but the immediate help of the Holy Spirit ; and therefore, John xvi. 9, it is said that the Spirit, when it comes, 'shall convince the world of sin ;' that is, it shall so manifest sin to be in the whole world, because of the general unbelief, as they shall see no remedy but in Christ ; and therefore we should beforehand search out the crafty allurements to sin, that we may be provided to give them an answer when they set upon us, lest we be suddenly overcome, and labour to see the excellency of the things that are freely given us of God, which amongst other titles are called a feast, 'a feast of fat things,' Isa. xxv. 6. Now if we will not feast with him, how do we ever think to suffer with him if he should call us thereto ? 'It is good.' How is it good ? Both in quality and condition ; for while we are here in this world we are strangers, and in an estate of imperfection as it were. Paul saith, while he was present in the body he was absent from the Lord ; and the more near perfection we are, the more near must we be to the ground of all perfection, and

* That is, 'convinced.'—G.

this is only in God. For, first, *he is goodness itself*. He hath the beauty of all, the strength of all, the goodness of all, originally in himself. He is the gathering together of all excellency and goodness. Secondly, he is *the universal good*. He is good to all. What all hath that is good, cometh from him. Of creatures, some have beauty, others riches, others have honours, but God hath all together. Thirdly, he is *the all-sufficient and satisfactory good*. The goodness of no creature can give full content; for the soul of man is capable of more than all created goodness together can satisfy. Only it is filled with God's likeness, and satisfied with communion with him. The best thing here to satisfy the soul, as Solomon witnesseth, is knowledge; and yet it contents not the heart of man: *sine Deo omnis copia est egestas*, [saith] Bernard.* God alone filleth every corner of the soul in him. We are swallowed up with 'joy unspeakable,' and 'peace that passeth understanding.' 'Eye cannot see it, ear cannot hear it, heart of man cannot conceive those things which even in this life are but beams of his brightness,' 1 Cor. ii. 9. Fourthly, God is a goodness *that is proportionable and fitting to our souls*, which is the best part in a man; and that which we draw near unto must communicate some loveliness, for that moves us to draw near to it. Now God is a Spirit fit to converse with our spirits; and he is love, and can answer the love and drawing near of our spirits with love and drawing near to us again. The things of this world cannot love us so as to give us content, or to help us in the day of wrath. Fifthly, *nothing can make us happy but drawing near to God*. If there were nothing in the world better than man, then man would be content with himself; but by nature it is evident man seeth a better happiness than is in himself, and therefore he seeketh for it out of himself. And as Solomon tried all things, and found no happiness but in the fear of God, so man cannot rest in any outward content till he comes to God as the Creator of all happiness, and the spring-head from whence the soul had its original; and therefore, 1 John i. 3, 'All the gospel is to this end, that we may have fellowship with the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ;' and 1 Pet. iii. 18, 'Christ's sufferings [were] to this end, that being dead in flesh, but quickened in the spirit, he might bring us again to God,' Eph. i. 10, and 22, 'That he might gather all into one head.' By sin we were scattered from God, from angels, and from our ourselves; but now by Christ we are made one, with one another, and with the holy angels, one with God our chief good.

For use hereof, it *should teach us to labour to attain to this estate of being spiritually convinced of the goodness of God*, that we may by experience say, 'It is good for me to draw near to God,' for God will not esteem of us according to our knowledge, but as our affections are, and therefore the wicked man he calls a worldling, because the world filleth him, let his knowledge be never so great. And the church in the Revelation is called heaven, because their affections and minds are that way, xxi. 1; and again, the more we are convinced of God's goodness, the better we are; for God's goodness, tasted and felt by the soul, doth ennoble it, as a pearl set in a gold ring maketh it the more rich and precious. But to come to the estate that is so commended to us, it is described to us by drawing near unto God, so as we may take this for a received ground, that

Doct. [Eighth,] Man's happiness is in communion with God. Before the fall of man, there was a familiar conversation with God; but by the sin of our first parents we lost this great happiness, and now we are strangers, and as contrary to God as light is contrary to darkness, and hell to heaven;

* A frequent sentiment in his Letters.—G.

he holy, we impure ; he full of knowledge, we stark fools ; and instead of delighting in him, we now tremble at his presence, and are afraid of such creatures as approach nigh to him, trembling at the presence of angels, nay, afraid of a holy man. 'What have I to do with thee, thou man of God? art thou come to call my sins to remembrance?' 1 Kings xvii. 18. And therefore we fly the company of good men, because their carriage and course of life do upbraid us ; and hence it is that at the least apprehension of God's displeasure, wicked men do quake. The heathen emperor trembled at a thunder clap.* But God, in his infinite mercy and goodness, left us not, but entertaining a purpose to choose some to draw near unto him ; and to this end he hath found out a way for man and him to meet, but no way for the angels ; and the foundation of this union is in Christ, in whom he reconciled the world to himself ; for he being God, became man, so to draw man back again unto God ; and thus, like Jacob's ladder, one end of it is in heaven, the other on earth. The angels ascending and descending shew a sweet intercourse between God and man, now reconciled together, so as Christ is now 'a living way' for ever, being 'the way, the truth, and the life.' He is a way far more near and sure than we had in Adam ; for in him God was in man, but now man subsisteth in God, so as our nature is now strengthened by him, who also hath enriched it and advanced it : and what he hath wrought in his own human nature, he by little and little will work in all his mystical members ; so being once far off, we are now made near, and this he did principally by his death, for reconciliation is made by his blood, Col. i. 20 ; and thus, by the admirable mystery of his deep wisdom, he hath found a means to make the seeming opposite attributes of justice and mercy to kiss each other, so as we are saved, and yet his infinite justice hath full content. For how could his hatred of sin appear more gloriously than in punishing it upon his own only beloved Son ? And therefore worthily he is called 'our peace ;' for he is that great peacemaker offering himself up, and us in him, 'as a sweet-smelling sacrifice, acceptable to God,' Philip. iv. 8, being then thus brought near to God, to keep and maintain this nearness, so as nothing may separate us again. He hath put into us his own Spirit, so as we are one spirit with Christ ; and by that Spirit he worketh in us and by us by that Spirit. We hear, read, pray, and as by the soul in us our bodies do live, breathe, and move, and the like, so he maketh his Spirit to move in us to a holy conversation and a heavenly life, being thus made 'partakers of the divine nature,' 2 Peter i. 4 ; and this sanctifies us to a holy communion with God ; and therefore the apostle prays, 2 Cor. xiii. 14, 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with them ;' that is, for a fuller manifestation of the love of God in sending Christ, the grace of Christ in coming to us, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, because by it we are made to live a holy life, and to communicate with God ; and thus the three persons in Trinity conspire together in reducing man back again to be more near to God.

Use 1. Now, for use of this, it should teach us *how to think on God*, not as all justice and power, hating sin and sinners, but as a Father, now laying aside terrible things that may scare us from drawing nigh to him, and as a God, stooping down to our human nature, to take both it and our miserable condition upon himself, and see our nature not only suffering with Christ, but rising, nay, now in heaven united to God ; and this will feed the soul with inestimable comfort.

* This is told of Nero.—G.

Use 2. Secondly, Labour to be more near to him, *by the more full participation of his Spirit*. Those that have not Christ's Spirit are none of his. By it we in Christ have access to God; and therefore the more spiritual we are, the nearer access we have to the secrets of God. In our first estate, we are altogether flesh, and have no spirit; in our present estate of grace, we are partly flesh and partly spirit; in our third estate in heaven, we shall be all spiritual; yea, our bodies shall be spiritual, 1 Cor. xv. 44. It is sown natural, but it shall be raised spiritual, and shall be obedient to our souls in all things, and our souls wholly possessed and led by the Spirit of God, so as then God shall be all in all with us; and for means hereunto,

First, *Labour to be conversant in spiritual means*, as in hearing of the word, receiving of the sacraments. God annexeth his Spirit to his own ordinances; and thence it is that in the communion with God in the ordinances, men's apprehensions are so enlarged as they are many times spiritually sick, and do long after the blessed enjoying of God's presence in heaven. But take heed how we come, think what we have to do, and with whom. Come not without the garment of Christ; and it is no matter how beggarly we are, this food is not appointed for angels, but for men. And come with an humble heart, as Elizabeth. Who am I, that (not the mother of my Lord) God himself from heaven should come to me! Luke i. 43.

Secondly, *Converse with those that draw near unto him*. God is present where two or three are assembled in his name, warming their hearts with love and affection, as it is said of the two disciples going to Emmaus, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while we walked in the way, and conferred of the sayings?' &c., Luke xxiv. 32. Oh, it is a notable sign of a spiritual heart to seek spiritual company; for when their hearts join together, they warm one another, and are hereby guarded from temptations; nay, the wicked themselves in God's company will be restrained. Saul, a wicked man, amongst the prophets will prophesy now, 1 Sam. x. 12. If by good company carnal men themselves do in a manner draw near to God, how acceptable ought this to be to us, and how powerful in us.

Thirdly, And especially, *be much in prayer*; for this is not only a main part of this duty of drawing near to God, but it is a great help thereunto. God is near to all that call upon him; for then are those most near to God when their understandings, affections, desires, trust, hope, faith, are busied about God; and therefore as Moses's face did shine with being in the presence of God, so those that are conversant in this duty of prayer have a lustre cast upon their souls, and their minds brought into a heavenly temper, and made fit for anything that is divine. I could wish that men would be more in public prayer, and that they would not forget private prayer, if ever they intend the comfort of their souls, not only hereafter, but even during this present life. For every day's necessities and dangers in the midst of many enemies, the devil, flesh, and world, ill company, and strong corruptions, should invite us to cast ourselves into the protection of an almighty Saviour. There is not a minute of time in all our life but we must either be near God or we are undone.

Fourthly, Observe *the first motions of sin in our hearts*, that may 'grieve the Spirit of God' in the least manner, and check them at the first. Give no slumber to thine eyes, then, nor the reins to thy desires: 'Thou, O man of God, fly the lusts of youth,' 2 Tim. ii. 22. The best things in us, if they come from nature in us, God abhors. Rebuke therefore the first

motions, before they come to delight or action. God abhorreth one that gives liberty to his thoughts, more than one that falleth into a grievous sin now and then, through strength of temptation; and such shall find comfort sooner of the pardon of their sins, for they cannot but see their offences to be heinous, and so have ground of abasement in themselves; but the other, thinking of the smallness of their sins, or at least that God is not much offended with thoughts, do fill themselves with contemplative wickedness, and chase away the Spirit of God, that cannot endure an unclean heart. We must therefore keep ourselves pure and unspotted of this present world, 'for the pure in heart shall see God,' Mat. v. 8; and 'without holiness none shall ever see him,' Heb. xii. 14. The least sin in thought, if it be entertained, it eats out the strength of the soul, that it can receive no good from God, nor close with him, so as it performeth all duties deadly and hollowly: Ps. lxxvi. 18, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear my prayer;' and hence it is that so little good is wrought in the ordinances of God. Men bring their lusts along with them. They neither know the sweetness of the presence of God's Spirit, neither do they desire it. It is a true rule that every sin hath intrinsically in it some punishment; but it is not the punishment that is the proper venom or poison of sin, but this, that it hinders the Spirit of God from us, and keeps us from him, and unfits us for life or for death. But this inward divorce from God's Spirit above all it is the most bitter stab that can befall any one that ever tasted of the sweetness of Christian profession. Now, for the better keeping of our thoughts, we should labour to watch against our outward senses, that by them thoughts be not darted into us. 'The eyes of the fool are in the corners of the world,' Prov. xvii. 24, saith the wise man; and therefore let men profess what they will, when they go to lewd company and filthy places, where corruptions are shot into them by all their senses, they neither can take delight to draw near to God, nor can God take any delight to draw near to them. Dinah, that will be straying abroad, comes home with shame; and that soul that either straggles after temptations, or suffereth temptations to enter into it uncontrolledly, both ways doth grieve God, and that good Spirit that should lead us to him. As for such as live in gross sins, as lying, blaspheming, swearing, drunkenness, adultery, or the like, let them never think of drawing near to God. They must first be civilised before they can appear to be religious; and they contrarily proclaim to the whole world that they say to God, 'Depart from us, for we will none of thy ways,' Job xxi. 14; so as God draws away from them, and they draw away from him.

Fifthly, *Be in God's walks and ordinances in a course of doing good*, in our Christian or civil calling, sanctified by prayer and a holy dependence upon God for strength, wisdom, and success. Go not out of those ways wherein he gives his angels charge of our persons and actions, and whatever we do. Labour to do it with perfection, as our Father in heaven is perfect.

Sixthly, *Observe God's dealings with the church*, both formerly and now in these days, and how he dealeth and hath formerly dealt with ourselves, that from experience of his faithfulness to us we may gather confidence to approach nigh him at any occasion. God's works and words do answer one another: 'Hath he said, and shall he not do it?' He is always good to Israel. Observe therefore how all things work together for thy particular drawing nigh unto him; for if all do work together for thy good,

then it must be of necessity for thy drawing near to God, and drawing thee away from this present world; and observe how thy soul answereth the purpose of God, how thy affections are bent, and so how all comes out for thy benefit at last. See God in afflictions embittering ill courses in thee; in thy success in thy affairs, encouraging thee; and thus walk with God. But evermore think of him as of a Father in covenant with thee.

Seventhly, *Labour to maintain humility*, having evermore a sense of thy unworthiness, and wants, and continual dependence on God, and thus humble thyself to walk with him. Hence the saints in God's presence call themselves 'dust and ashes,' as Abraham, Gen. xviii. 27; 'and less than the least of God's mercies,' as Jacob, Gen. xxxii. 10. God is 'a consuming fire,' Heb. xii. 29, and will be sanctified in all that come nigh unto him. He will give grace to the humble, but beholdeth the proud afar off, as they look on others: James iv. 8, 'Draw near to the Lord, and he will draw near to you.' Humble yourselves under 'the mighty hand of God,' and he will lift you up. He that lifteth himself up, maketh himself a god; and God will endure no co-rivals. Contrarily, he dwelleth in the heart of the humble, Isa. lxvi. 2; and in the Psalms, 'An humble and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.' But pride he abhorreth as an abomination of desolation.

Eighthly, *Labour for sincerity in all our actions*. Whatever we do to God or man, do it with a single eye, resolute to please God. Let men say what they will, 'a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways,' James i. 8; and what is a double-minded man, but one that hath one eye on God, another on a by-respect? If religion fail him, he will have favour of men, or wealth, yet would fain have both, for credit sake. Such are gross temporisers; and in time, of temporisers [it] will appear that their religion serves but for a cloak to their vile hypocrisy. This God loathes, and will 'spue them out,' Rev. iii. 16.

Ninthly, *Observe the first motions of God's Spirit*; and give diligent heed to them, for by these God's knocks for entrance into the heart: Rev. iii. 20, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock.' God is near when he knocks, when he putteth inclinations into the heart, and sharpeneth them with afflictions. If, then, we stop our ears, we may say 'the kingdom of God was near unto us;' but if he once ceaseth knocking, our mouths shall for ever be stopped; and for this reason it is that so many live daily under the means, and yet live in vile courses, as if God had determined their doom. They resisted the first motions, and close with their lusts, and so God pronounceth a curse: 'Make this people's heart fat,' Isa. vi. 10. On the contrary, those that will open to God while he continues knocking, God will come in and make an everlasting tabernacle in them, and sup with them, Rev. iii. 20.

Lastly, *Take up daily controversies that do arise in us, through the inconsistency of our deceivable hearts*. Repentance must be every day's work, renewing our covenant, especially every morning and evening; repair breaches by confession; and considering the crossness of our hearts, commit them to God by prayer: 'Knit my heart to thee, that I may fear thy name,' Ps. lxxxvi. 11.

A third use of this doctrine is of *instruction*; and, first, to teach us that a Christian that thus draweth near to God is the wisest man. He hath God's word, reason, and experience to justify his course. He is the wisest man that is wise for himself. The Christian feels it and knows it, and can justify himself, 2 Tim. i. 12. Paul suffered, and was not ashamed.

Why? 'I know,' saith he, 'whom I have believed.' Let men scorn, I pass* not for man's censure. They shall never scorn me out of my religion; and for them, the Scripture, that can best judge, calls those wicked men fools; for they refuse God, who is the chiefest good, and seek for content where none is to be found. Contrarily, if we do affect honour, or riches, or pleasure, God is so gracious as in religion he gives us abundance of these. In God is all fulness; in Christ are unsearchable riches; in God everlasting strength, 'and his favour is better than the life itself,' Ps. lxiii. 3. Abithophel was wise, but it was to hang himself; Saul a mighty man, but to shed his own blood; Haman's honour ended in shame.

Secondly, Hence we may learn *how to justify zeal in religion*. If to be near God be good, then the nearer him the better; if religion be good, then the more the better; if holiness be good, then the more the better; it is best to excel in the best things. Who was the best man but Christ, and why? He was nearest the fountain. And who are next but the angels, and why? Because they are always in God's presence. And who next but those that are nearest to Christ. If we could get angelical holiness, were it not commendable? And therefore it should shame us to be backward, and cold, and to have so little zeal, as to be ashamed of goodness, as most are.

Thirdly, This should teach us *that a man must not break with God for any creature's sake whatever*. It is good to lose all for God. Why? Because we have riches in him, liberty in him, all in him. A man may be a king on earth, and yet a prisoner in himself; and if we lose anything, though it be our own life, for God, we shall save it. If we be swallowed up of outward misery, the Spirit of God, that 'searcheth the deep things of God,' 1 Cor. ii. 10, passes and repasses, and puts a relish into us of the 'unsearchable riches of Christ,' Eph. iii. 8. 'Taste and see how good God is,' Ps. xxxiv. 8. 'How excellent is thy loving-kindness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee,' Ps. xxxvi. 7. 'How precious are thy thoughts to me, O Lord,' Ps. xxxix. 17. 'Thou hast the words of everlasting life, whither then shall I go?' said Peter, when he felt but a spark of the divine power, John vi. 68.

A further use of this doctrine shall be an use of *trial, to know whether we draw near to God or not*.

First, therefore, where this is, there will be *a further desire of increase of communion with God*. The soul will not rest in measure, Exod. xxxiii. 11, *seq.* Moses had divers entertainments of God: he had seen him in 'the bush,' and in mount Sinai, and many other times; but not contented herewith, he would needs see God's face. And thus Abraham, he gathers upon God still more and more ground in his prayers: 'What if fifty, what if forty, what if twenty, what if ten righteous be found there?' saith he, Gen. xviii. 24, *seq.* And Jacob, how often was he blessed whom Isaac blessed, when he was to go into Paran! when he was there at his return; and yet when he comes to wrestle with the angel, 'I will not let thee go till thou bless me,' Gen. xxxii. 26. And the reason is, because as God is a fountain never to be drawn dry, so is man an emptiness never filled, but our desires increase still till we arrive in heaven; and therefore the more we work, and the more we pray, and the more good we do, the more do our desires increase in doing good.

Secondly, This will appear *in abasing or humbling ourselves*, as it was with Abraham. The more near God is, the more humbly he falls on his

* That is, 'pause,' = care for.—G.

face, and confesseth he is but 'dust and ashes.' The angels, in token of reverence, do cover their faces, 'being in the presence of God.' And it is an universal note, that all such as draw near to God, they are humble and reverent in holy duties; and therefore proud persons have no communion with God at all.

Thirdly, *The nearer we are to God, the more we admire heavenly things;* and count all others 'dross and dung,' as St Paul, Philip. iii. 8. When the sun riseth, the stars they vanish; and those that do not admire the joy, peace, and happiness of a Christian, are unacquainted with drawing near to God.

Fourthly, *When we have a sense and sight of sin, then we may truly be said to 'draw near,'* and to be near to God; for by his light are our eyes enlightened, and we are quickened by his heat and love; and hence we come to see little sins great sins, and are afraid of the beginnings of sin: 'Lord, purge me from my secret sins; create in me a new heart; oh let the thoughts of my heart be always acceptable in thy sight,' Ps. xix. 12. And those that make no scruple of worldly affairs on the Lord's day, of light, small oaths, as they call them, or of corrupt discourse, they neither are nor can draw near to God.

Fifthly, *The nearer we draw to God, the more is our rest.* 'Come unto me, all you that are weary and heavy laden, and you shall find rest unto your souls,' Mat. xi. 28. Ps. xvi. 4, 'The sorrows of those that worship another god shall be multiplied,' and therefore they may well maintain doubting. And therefore such, if they be in their right minds, never end their days comfortably.

Sixthly, *In all distresses, those that draw near to God will fly to him with confidence;* but a guilty conscience is afraid of God, as of a creditor that oweth him punishment, or that intendeth to cast him into perpetual prison. And as a child will in all his wrongs go and complain to his father, Rom. v. 2, *seq.*, so if we have the spirit of sons we have access to God, and peace with God, and can come boldly to the throne of grace, to find help in him at need.

Seventhly, *He that is near to God is neither afraid of God nor of any creature,* for God and he are in good terms. In the midst of thundering and lightning, Moses hath heart to go near, when the Israelites fly, and stand afar off: Ps. xxvii. 1, 'The Lord is the strength of my salvation, of whom shall I be afraid?' Ps. cxii. 7, 'He that feareth the Lord will not be afraid of evil tidings;' but, contrarily, on the wicked there are fears, and snares, and pits. They fear where no cause of fear is; and when God revealeth his terror, indeed then, Isa. xxxiii. 14, 'the sinners in Sion are afraid, and the hypocrites that make show of holiness are surprised with fearfulness; who amongst us shall dwell with devouring fire, and who amongst us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?'

Eighthly, *The nearer we are to God, the more in love we will be with spiritual exercises;* the more near to God, the more in love with all means to draw nigh to him; as of books, sermons, good company. My delight 'is in the excellent of the earth,' Ps. xvi. 3; 'Oh how I love thy law,' Ps. cxix. 97; 'How beautiful are thy dwelling-places, O Lord of hosts,' Ps. lxxxiv. 1.

Ninthly, *He that is near God is so warmed with love of him, so that he will stand against opposition,* and that out of experience—'He that delivered me out of the paw of the bear, will deliver me from the hands of this uncircumcised Philistine,' 1 Sam. xvii. 37,—and out of his experience he will

be encouraged to use the ordinances of God. He will pray, because he hath found the sweetness of it; he will be in good company, because he finds it preserves him in a better temper for the service of God; he will hear the word spiritually and plainly laid open to him, because he hath found the power of it in renewing and quickening his affections and desires; and those that do not draw nigh to God, do either loathe, or at least are indifferent, to days, to companies, to exercises. All are alike to them; and they wonder at the niceness of Christians that take so much labour and pains, whenas a man may go to heaven at an easier rate by much; and, on the contrary, Christians do as much wonder at them, that they are so careless, whenas 'few are called;' and of those that are called, some 'hear the word, but receive it not.' Some receive, 'and in time of trial fall off,' Luke viii. 5, so as not the third part of hearers are saved. What then now remaineth but that we should be *encouraged unto this duty of drawing near unto God*. We see how Scripture, reason, and experience proves that it is a thing necessary and profitable; and those that are far from God shall perish, and those that go a-whoring from him he will destroy, as it is in the foregoing verse. Those that are either of a whorish judgment, or affections after lust or covetousness, or the like, God will curse, for all sin is but adultery, or defiling of the soul with the creature; and therefore labour for chaste judgments and affections; love him, and fear him above all, and this is the whole duty of man; and use other creatures in their own place, as creatures should be used. We know not what troubles and difficulties we shall meet with ere long, wherein neither friends nor all the world can do us any good; and then happy shall we be if, with a comfortable heart, we can go to God with David: Ps. xxii. 11, 'Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help.' If God be then far off from us when trouble is near to us, we may go and cry to him; but his answer will be, Prov. i. 31, 'You shall eat the fruit of your own way; you have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof.' You would not draw nigh to me; you shall now call and seek to me, but now you shall not draw nigh to me, you shall not find me. What, then, can our friends do? What can the whole world then supply to us, when sickness comes as 'an armed man,' and death as a mighty giant, against whom is no resisting; but will we or nill we, away we must be gone? Then to have a God nigh us, to whom we may go as Peter did in the storm, 'O Master, save me, I perish,' Mark iv. 36; then to have a friend in heaven, who can for the present guide us by his counsel, and instruct us against Satan's wiles and our deceivable hearts, and be a safe guard to us in the fire and in the water, in the dungeon and when we are in the greatest depths of misery to outward sense; though in death, in the shadow of death, and in the valley of the shadow of death, yet can send us such cheerful remembrances of his love, as the cloud shall be scattered, the shadow taken away, and death, an enemy, shall be a friend; nay, a friendly meeting between God and the soul, so as the soul shall triumph in death, and shall delight to die, and desire it: 'Lord, now let thy servant depart in peace, for,' by the eye of faith, I have 'waited for thy salvation,' Luke ii. 29; I say, then will the sweetness of this estate of drawing near to God be manifested to us, and then shall we not repent of any labour or travail spent in our lifetime, in the attaining of such a condition.