

# THE PASTOR'S FAREWELL.

BY

GEORGE SWINNOCK

## THE EPISTLE DEDICATORY.

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To his honoured and courteous Friend, MRS MARY BERESFORD,  
Wife of the Worshipful JOHN BERESFORD, Esq.

THERE are two things which I have always judged chiefly requisite in a pastor, as he standeth related to his people—viz., labour and love. The former is a work of the head, the latter of the heart: faithful labour will speak his love, and sincere love will sweeten his labour. Labour without love is unacceptable to God; as a sweet perfume without fire, it cannot send forth its pleasant, fragrant savour. Love without labour is unprofitable to men; like Rachel, it is beautiful, but barren; both together—as soul and body are the essential parts of a man—are the whole of a minister. Whether to my power I discharged my trust or no in these particulars, whilst the divine providence continued me in your parish, I must leave to his judgment, whose eyes behold, and whose eyelids try the children of men; nay, whether I did not many times so labour as to prejudice my own body, that I might serve and profit others' souls; but sure I am, when I left you I could not better manifest my love to you than by commending you to him who will never leave nor forsake his people.

It is the saying of Euripides, That a faithful friend in adversity is better than a calm sea to a weather-beaten mariner. Indeed, the world is full of false lovers, who use their friends as we do candles, burn them to the snuff, and when all their substance is wasted, trample them under their feet, and light others; but God to his chosen is as the ivy clasping about a wall, which will as soon die as desert it. Extremity doth but fasten a trusty friend; whilst he, as a well-wrought vault, is the stronger by how much more weight he beareth. Though many men are as ponds, dry in the heat of summer, when there is most need of them, yet the blessed God dealeth not so with his saints; but his help is nearest when their hardships are greatest. When they walk in the valley of the shadow of death, he is with them.

How great a happiness it is to be under the favour and influence of this God can never be fully known on this side heaven. The Prince of Orange had a mirror, say some, which perfectly repre-

sented the beauty of the natural sun. But this Sun of righteousness is ever in a great degree eclipsed to us who dwell in this lower world. Here we know but in part. Pompey, who presumed to enter the holiest of all, when he came out was asked what he saw. He answered, That the house was full of a cloud. Indeed, he maketh darkness his secret place, and yet is pleased to let so much of his glory and goodness be seen in the glass of his word, as may cause us to admire and affect him, and also assure us that he is the chiefest good.

Somewhat of that felicity which floweth from his favour you will find in some measure discovered in the ensuing discourse, which I present to you as a small acknowledgment of my great engagements to you. Lycurgus, the Lacedæmonian lawgiver, made no law against ingratitude, as thinking it impossible for any man to degenerate so much as to be unthankful. I esteem it my duty to retain the former favours in memory which I and mine have received from yourself and my honoured friend, your husband; and I know not better how to testify my gratitude, than by endeavouring to my power your everlasting welfare, and that you may come to your graves in a full age, as a shock of corn in its season.

It is a mercy to be full of days, a far greater mercy to be full of grace; but to be full of days and full of grace is one of the most blessed, beautiful sights in this world. I hope you are passed from death to life, because you love the brethren; but your age calleth upon you to ensure your effectual calling. The truth is, death borders upon our births, and our coffins hang over our cradles; but though, according to the saying of Epaminondas, we may salute young persons with good-morrow, or welcome, into the world; yet we must salute old persons with good-night, for they are leaving the world. The nearer it is to night, the harder we should work, when we know, if our work be not done in this day of life, we are undone for ever. Natural motions are swiftest at last. The stream of grace must run with greatest speed when it is emptying itself into the ocean of glory. The good Lord enable you to be more and more upright and abundant in well-doing, and so bless your whole family with his fear and favour, that when death shall break it up ye may be preferred from his lower house of prayer to his upper house of praise, where is fulness of joy, and where are pleasures for evermore; which is the desire of

Your servant in the blessed Saviour,

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HUMAN histories have been valued at such a high price, that they have been dedicated to the most honourable persons, as worthy of their serious perusal. Pliny's Natural History to Vespasian; our English History to King James; the small treatise which Paulus Jovius wrote, *De Rebus Turcicis*, unto the great and mighty emperor Charles the Fifth; scarce any national piece but it is presented into the hands of the prince. Surely divine histories then, such as this treatise, the Acts of the Apostles, which contain the heroic acts of the Lord's worthies in their combats with, and conquests over, not only men and the world, but sin and Satan, deserve the eye, and ear, and hearts of a noble Theophilus, of great and small, of all men whatsoever.

The former part of the New Testament contains the great mystery of Christ, the head of his church. This book of the Acts contains the glorious history of the church, the body of Christ.

In the beginning of the book some particulars are mentioned of all the apostles, to chapter xiii. ; but it treats most largely of Paul's trials and travels, in regard that, as his conversion was most miraculous, so his conversation was most illustrious.

In this 20th chapter we have this famous apostle in his fourth peregrination arriving at Miletus, a city upon the borders of Ionia and Cæsarea, close by the shore of the Ægean Sea, and sending thence for, and speaking to, the Ephesian elders.

In his speech we may observe these four parts.

First, His vindication of himself. Ministers are bound not only

to look to their consciences, but also to their credits. Naturalists tell us, if the loadstone be rubbed with garlic it loseth its virtue. When the name of a minister is contemptible, his doctrine will be the less acceptable. The apostle vindicateth himself—1. As to the integrity of his life: ‘Ye know from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility, and with many tears,’ vers. 18, 19. It is excellent when the pastor can appeal to the consciences of his people for the purity of his conversation. Holy ministers are called angels, Rev. ii., but unholy ones are degenerated into devils: ‘Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil.’ 2. As to his fidelity in his doctrine: ‘And how I have kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house,’ ver. 20. The steward is faithful who distributeth to every person under his charge their proper and peculiar portion. The symbol of Wolfius will become every preacher: *Pietate et labore*.<sup>1</sup> By a sacred life, and sedulous labour, he will best declare his love to his people. Ministers must be stars by the influence of their lips feeding, by the regular motion of their lives confirming, and by the light of both directing many. Paul magnified his office, why should others debase it?

Secondly, His exhortation to them. As he taught them before by his pattern, so now by his precepts: ‘Take heed to the flocks over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers,’ ver. 28. Take heed,<sup>2</sup> that is, let all your care and study be for your own and people’s welfare and prosperity; like good shepherds, work and watch night and day for the good of your sheep. This counsel the apostle urgeth upon a threefold ground.

1. From the person who committed to them this charge: ‘Take heed to the flocks over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers.’ It concerns you to be true to your trust, when it is committed to you by the Spirit of God. That unfaithfulness which is but felony against the charge of a subject, may be treason when it is against the charge of a sovereign. Oh it is ill trifling with the most high God’s trust!

2. From the price paid for them: ‘To feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his blood,’ ver. 28. Things of the greatest cost call for our greatest care; souls are infinitely precious, and therefore deserve our utmost pains. If God thought them worth his blood, we may well esteem them worth our tears and sweat.

<sup>1</sup> Melch. Ad.

<sup>2</sup> Ἱπποεχετε, Toti sitis addicti, totis animis adhæreatis.

3. From the peril their flock was in: vers. 29-31, 'For I know that after my departing, shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw disciples after them. Therefore watch,' &c. If wolves will watch to devour, shepherds must watch to defend the sheep. Those commanders who are entrusted with a garrison, when they are sure to have their quarters beaten up, had need to be ever upon their guard.

Thirdly, His prediction of his future sufferings, 1. Propounded. 'And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing what shall befall me there: saving that the Holy Ghost witnesseth that in every city bonds and afflictions abide me,' vers. 22, 23. Christians of all men must bear their crosses; ministers of all Christians must look to undergo misery; and the more good a minister hath, the more evil he must expect. The fuller the tree is laden, the more cudgels will be thrown at it; the most fruitful meadows hear oftenest in the year of the scythe. Pious and laborious Paul was the chief butt against which men and devils shot. 2. Amplified, from the liberty it thereby denied them of ever seeing Paul again: 'And now, behold, I know that ye all amongst whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more,' ver. 25. Sad news to honest hearts upon a double ground; partly their lack of him. He had told them of wolves entering in among them; now at such a time for the flock to be without a guide; when the storm arose for the vessel to be without a pilot; when the soldiers were to engage in hot service with enemies, for their expert commander to be wanting; must needs be woeful. That the nurse should be taken away before the children could go alone, did much affect and afflict their spirits. Partly their love to him. As Paul was a religious person, and as he was, probably, their spiritual parent who had begotten them, brought them up in the nurture of the Lord, and upon all occasions advised and assisted them, they could not but love him in a high degree, and therefore much lament his loss.

Fourthly, His valediction to those Ephesian elders in the words of the text: 'And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance amongst all them which are sanctified,' ver. 32. Before he had given them a command from God, and now he commends them to God. The words contain the legacy which Paul bequeathes to his Christian friends. He taketh his farewell of them, and wisheth a welfare to them.

*And now, καὶ νυν*, since I see that I, who am your guide, must shortly be gone, and since I foresee that wolves will arise, so ravenous as to conspire and endeavour your ruin, what remains, but that I should commend you to God, who can prevent the effects of their cruelty, and supply the want of my company. And now the reason is observable. It is the last and the greatest kindness I can do to commend you to God. The occasion is considerable. And now the dying father commits his children to a faithful guardian: And now I must leave you, never to see your faces more; but now I shall leave you to one who will never leave you nor forsake you. ‘And now,’

*Brethren, ἀδελφοί*. This title is an affectionate term, and speaks how dear and near they were to the apostle. It discovereth much of his humility; though they were his inferiors, yet he calleth them his equals. Brethren stand on the same level. But more of his love. This even relation is accompanied with great affection: ‘Love as brethren,’ 1 Pet. iii. 8. Love, like water, doth not easily ascend, but will run swiftly and pleasantly on even ground. And now, my dearly beloved, whom I both love and esteem as brethren, who are both near and dear to me, since providence is parting us, I cannot better evidence my affection to you, or care of you, than by committing you to him, from whom none can part you. ‘And now, brethren,’

*I commend you to God.*<sup>1</sup> To commend one to another, in our English phrase, is either to praise him for some worth in him, or to present some respects from him; but in Scripture sense, besides the former acceptations, it sometimes signifieth to refer one to the care of another: Rom. xvi. 1, ‘I commend to you Phebe our sister.’ To commend in this place signifieth to commit them as dear pledges, or as precious jewels, to the tender custody and keeping of the blessed God. As if he had said, Be not discouraged nor disconsolate at my departure, as if thereby ye should be left desolate, for I commit and commend you to one who will abundantly make up my absence by his almighty power and favourable presence. Though I am taken from you, and constrained to forsake you, yet I commend you to that God who will be careful of you, and never fail you; who hath infinite strength for your protection, and infinite wisdom for your direction, and infinite favour for your consolation. ‘And now, brethren, I commend you to God,’

<sup>1</sup> Παράτρεμαι ὑμᾶς τῷ Θεῷ. Παράτρεμαι, significat patrocinio, curæ, ac tutelæ alterius aliquid commendare.—Beza. Commendare veluti commendatur depositum servandum.

*And to the word of his grace, καὶ τῷ λογῷ της χάριτος αὐτοῦ.* The Scripture is called God's word, because as men by their words discover their wills, so God by the Scripture doth manifest his mind and pleasure. But it is that part of Scripture which we call the gospel, which is emphatically termed here, and in some other places, the word of his grace, because it speaketh God's good-will and good-pleasure to the children of men, Acts xx. 24; Tit. ii. 11. The covenant of works which God made with Adam, and in him with all mankind, was in some respects a covenant of grace, for God was not bound to promise man eternal felicity upon his perfect obedience, but might have required it by virtue of his sovereignty and dominion. But since man's apostasy, and impossibility thereby of attaining happiness by his own works, God hath been pleased to accept of the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ, on the behalf of the believing, penitent Christian; which act of infinite grace being revealed in the gospel, it is most fitly called the word of his grace. The law, as the case stands with man now, speaks nothing but fury and death, but the gospel speaks favour and life; the law wounds man with his blows, the gospel heals him with its balsam; the law condemneth man without pity to the sufferings of hell, but the gospel alloweth him a psalm of mercy, and so saveth him from the wrath to come. Now the affectionate apostle commendeth his fainting patients to this rich cordial, the word of his grace. They might think it was small comfort and a poor courtesy to be commended to a righteous and jealous God, as stubble to be committed to a consuming fire; therefore he tells them, I commend you to God, not under the notion of an angry judge, but in the relation of a gracious father, and compassionate friend, which, if ye doubt of, do but look into the gospel, which is heaven's court rolls transcribed, wherein ye may see the naked bowels of his good-will, and read his curious eternal contrivance of magnifying his grace in you, and towards you. I commend you to that word of his grace wherein every line speaks love, and each expression his tender affection to you. I know your poverty, but that word of his grace is a mine of unsearchable riches; ye are hungry, but that is bread; when ye are weary, there ye may find rest; whatsoever your conditions be, there is suitable consolation. 'And to the word of his grace,'

*Which is able to build you ὑμῶν, τῷ δυναμένῳ ἐποικοδομοῦσαι.* These words, with them that follow, are by Erasmus, according to our translation, referred to the word of his grace, but according to Beza and some others, God is the antecedent to this relative, who



is able to build you up, &c. The reason of the doubt is, because both are of the same gender, whereby it is uncertain to which of the two this latter part hath relation. But there is a certain truth if we refer them to either: God is able to build them up, &c.; and also the gospel or word of his grace is able to build them up, &c. God as the first cause and principal efficient, the word of his grace as the second cause and subordinate instrument. The gospel cannot do it without God, and God will not do it without the gospel. God, ordinarily, by the gospel doth both sanctify and save, build up and give an inheritance.

‘Which is able to build you up.’ The foundation of godliness was already laid in their hearts, but something was still wanting, a greater degree of grace and holiness. Paul knew that his brethren would not be contented barely to know Christ, but were desirous to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of Christ, and did therefore the more lament his loss, because he, as a faithful steward, had furthered the welfare of their souls, by giving them their food in due season. Now, to allay their fears of famishing for want of his care, he commends them both to the same master, and to the same meat, by which they had hitherto thriven and prospered, and which were able still to continue the same virtue, and communicate the same strength; which is able to build you up,

*And to give you an inheritance, καὶ δοναὶ ὑμῖν κληρονομίαν.* Two things the children of God do exceedingly desire—proficiency in grace, and perfection thereof in glory. The apostle, in his valedictory speech, commends them to that God, and to the word of his grace, which can answer both their requests, progress in holiness, and the possession of happiness, ‘which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance.’ Saints are heirs, joint heirs with Christ, Rom. viii. 17. Heaven is their proper and peculiar inheritance: ‘The inheritance of the saints in light,’ Col. i. 12. The gospel or word of his grace purifieth and prepareth them for it, and also is the deeds or conveyance speaking their right and title to it; therefore is called the gospel of our salvation. God is the author and donor of it. Glory is his free gift: ‘It is your Father’s pleasure to give you a kingdom,’ Luke xii. 32.

*Among all them that are sanctified, ἐν τοῖς ἡγιασμένοις πάνσιν.* The inhabitants of heaven are all holy. Those that shall be glorified must first be sanctified. The inner court was a type of heaven, into which none might enter but the priests, which were holy to the Lord. Saints are all priests; a holy priesthood, Rev. i. 6.

The sum of the whole verse is thus much: ‘And now, brethren,’

&c. And now, my dearly beloved brethren, since infinitely wise providence seeth fit to deprive you of my presence, and I know the groans of your spirits to be after a farther degree of sanctification here, and its consummation hereafter, I commit and commend you to God, through whose strength the word of his grace is able to give you both growth in grace while ye live, and the crown of glory when ye die, amongst all them that are prepared for it by being partakers of the same hope and holiness. 'And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance amongst all them that are sanctified.'

In the words we may observe these three parts :

First, The compellation, 'brethren.' The company of saints are a society of brethren : 'Love the brotherhood.' The company of sinners are a rabble of conspirators.

Secondly, The commendation of these brethren : 'And now, brethren, I commend you.' This commendation of them is amplified,

1. By the object—(1.) To God, as the fountain of their grace and bliss ; (2.) To the gospel or word of his grace, as the channel in which it was conveyed to them.

2. By the effects, which are two : (1.) Proficiency, 'which is able to build you up' ; having laid the foundation, it is able to increase the building of grace ; (2.) Perfection, it is able to lay the top-stone, and overlay it with glory, 'and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified.'

3. The occasion, or special season of this commendation. 'And now, brethren.' No doubt Paul had many a time before commended them to God : 'Without ceasing he made mention always in his prayers ;' but now, upon his leaving them, he doth in a special manner commend them to God's care and keeping : 'And now, brethren.'

I shall draw some observations from the words, and then lay down the doctrine which I intend to prosecute.

That sanctity is no enemy to civility. The apostle being to leave them, doth not abruptly turn his back upon them, but solemnly takes his leave of them. 'And now, brethren.' Some think they cannot be Christians unless they be clowns, that good works and good manners are inconsistent ; but though Christianity pare off the luxuriant branches of courtesy, yet it doth not root it up ; like those spices which we apply to windy fruits, it takes away the flatulency and offensiveness which may be in it, but doth

not cast it away. Civil language and a courteous carriage are, though no part of, yet an ornament to, Christianity. The saints of God are ever civil; and whereas sinners are complimentary, they are cordial in all their salutes. The holy apostle spendeth the greatest part of a chapter in courteous salutations, which he would not have done had it been either unlawful or unnecessary.

That grace will turn civil courtesy into serious Christianity. The apostle doth not take a bare civil farewell of them, according to the custom of most men, but solemnly takes his leave of them by commending them to the blessed God: 'And now, brethren, I commend you to God.' A gracious man prefers his low and civil actions unto the high form of religion; wicked men debase actions that are sacred, and godly men advance actions that are civil. As the iron mine gives a tincture and relish of its own nature to all the waters which run through it, making them thereby more salubrious to our bodies; so grace gives a savour and taste of its own nature and property to all the actions about which the subject in which it is is conversant, and thereby makes them more healthful to our souls. It sanctifieth our very salutes: 'Salute one another with an holy kiss,' Rom. xvi. 16. Kissing seems to be wholly civil; but among the godly it is sacred—'an holy kiss.'<sup>1</sup>

That all Christians are brethren. 'And now, brethren.' Saints are all linked together in the bond of brotherhood. The Jews called all brethren of the same country; and it was the custom of the primitive Christians to call all brethren and sisters of the same communion.<sup>2</sup> They are brethren if we consider their relations; they have all the same Father, God: 'I will be to you a Father, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty,' 2 Cor. vi. 18. They are not only adopted, but also begotten again, or regenerated, by the same God, John i. 12; James i. 21. They are all children of the same mother: 'Jerusalem which is above is free, the mother of us all,' Gal. iv. 26. They suck the same breasts, Isa. lxvi. 11; 1 Pet. ii. 2; wear the same garments, and as they grow up, feed at the same table, and shall dwell together in the same house for ever. They are united under the same head, renewed with the same hearts, and travel to the same heaven. They are brethren in regard of affection. The curtains of the tabernacle were joined together with loops, and so are true Christians with love; they love as brethren, seeking the good and welfare of each

<sup>1</sup> The use of kissing was frequent amongst the saints in their holy meetings.—*Tertul. de Orat.*

<sup>2</sup> *Tertul. Apol.*, cap. 39.

other. A saint's talents are not an enclosure for his private profit, but a common for the advantage of others. Their desires are not confined within their own dwellings, but they reach thousands in their prayers, whom they can never reach on earth in their persons. 'For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee,' Ps. cxxii. 8; they sympathise in each other's sufferings, and rejoice in one another's solace. Every saint is a great merchant, who hath his factors in all parts of the world, trading for him at the throne of grace.

That the gospel is the word of God's grace. 'And to the word of his grace.' The word *grace* is taken in Scripture,

1. For favour or good-will. 'Grace be with you.' And so Col. i. 2, 'Grace be unto you.'

2. For the effects and fruits thereof: Jude 4, 'Turning the grace of God into lasciviousness.'

The gospel in both respects is fitly termed the word of his grace—

1. Because it containeth the infinite grace and favour of the most high God to sinners. The law speaks in effect man's bottomless misery, but the gospel speaks God's boundless mercy; the law is a court of justice, but the gospel a throne of grace. Grace sits as commander-in-chief in the gospel, and, as Ahasuerus to Esther, holdeth out the golden sceptre of mercy, for poor condemned persons to touch with the hand of faith, and live. The sum of the gospel is comprehended in the song of that angelical choir: 'Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and good-will towards men.' The substance and body of God's love to man was never dissected and laid open to the view of mortals till the gospel was preached. Before, it ran as a river under ground; but in the gospel it bursts forth and sheweth itself, to refresh us with its pleasant streams. The law is, as it were, a warrant under Heaven's hand and seal for man's execution; but the gospel, like the dove, comes flying swiftly to prevent it, with the olive branch of peace and pardon in its mouth. Choosing grace, Eph. i. 5, calling grace, 2 Tim. i. 9, justifying grace, Rom. iii. 24, and glorifying grace, 1 Pet. iii. 7, are all discovered in the gospel; and therefore it may well be called the word of his grace.

2. Because the gospel is the effect and fruit of God's grace or good-will to men. Philosophers observe that dew never falleth in stormy, tempestuous weather: the dropping of the dew of the gospel on parched, scorched hearts, is a sign and fruit of serene, calm heavens. That our parts of the world, like Gideon's fleece, should

be wet with this dew when other parts are dry, this is merely from grace: 'I have caused it to rain on one city, and not upon another,' Amos iv. 7. This rain of the gospel, which cooleth heat, melloweth the hearts, and cleanseth the unholy, goeth by coasts, Ps. cxlvii. 19, 20.

3. Because the gospel is the usual means of begetting grace. As manna fell about the Israelites' tents with the dew, so grace is distilled and dropped down with the gospel. Many of the Jews heard the thunders of Sinai, the threatenings of the law, and were not moved; but the Baptist wins their children with the songs of Zion, the promises of the gospel: 'Received ye the Spirit by the preaching of the law or the hearing of faith?' The ice which is hardened by the cold, is melted with the sun. When the murderers of our Saviour heard the gospel, they were pricked to the heart, Acts ii. 37. The hard flint is broken upon the soft pillow.

That the gospel is effectual, not only for conversion, but also for edification. 'Which is able to build you up.' The gospel doth not only bring forth souls to Christ, but likewise build up souls in Christ. The natural child is nourished, when in the world, by the same seed, by a further concoction turned into milk, by which it was conceived in the womb; the spiritual child is begotten by the gospel: 'I have begotten you through my gospel;' and built up by the same: 1 Pet. ii. 2, 'As new born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.'

That the word of God's grace can carry men to glory. 'And to give you an inheritance.' It doth, like Moses, lead the saint out of Egypt, deliver him from bondage to his lusts, conduct him through the wilderness of the world, and also, like Joshua, bring him into Canaan, the land of promise. It is called 'the grace of God which bringeth salvation,' Titus ii. 11. It bringeth salvation to man, and it bringeth man to salvation.

That heaven is an inheritance. 'And to give you an inheritance.' An inheritance is an estate left or given by the father to his son and heir; saints are all God's sons, and his sons are all first-born, and so heirs. God's natural Son is his natural heir, but his adopted sons are his adopted heirs, and so have an inheritance given them by their Father. Others have inheritances by their births; saints have theirs by their new birth. Their inheritance is incomparable; it is the same which the natural heir hath, 'joint heirs with Christ;' earthly possessions are to it less than nothing. Their right to it is indefeasible; 'an inheritance reserved for us in heaven,' 1 Pet. i. 4.

They can never be deprived of it, either by others' cruelty, nor their own carelessness, for it is in God's keeping, reserved for us.

That the inheritance of heaven is only for them that are holy. 'Among all them that are sanctified.' None but the children of God, such as are born again, are heirs of this inheritance. All that are saved must be sanctified. The inheritance is undefiled, and so must all the inhabitants be. If a carnal, unsanctified person ever enter into that royal palace, he must first make the gospel a lie, and God a liar: 'And into it can in no wise enter anything that is defiled or unclean,' Rev. xxi. 27. All that are there are admitted into God's immediate service; and will so great a king be served in unclean vessels? Dirty feet are not for royal presence-chambers.

The doctrine which I intend to prosecute, and which will include the substance of the verse, is this:

The doctrine, That the greatest good a pastor can do for his brethren whom he must leave, is to commend them to God. 'And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace.'

I shall speak principally to the fountain of their being and bliss, their recommendation to God, and in the close of the sermon briefly touch the channel of the gospel, which he hath cut out as the means of conveying his blessings to the children of men. I say again, that it is the duty, and the greatest good a minister can do for his friends whom he must leave, to commend them to God. The apostle had a great love to, and tender respect for, the brethren, but how doth he manifest it? By commending them to God.

That it is the practice, duty, and greatest kindness of Christians to commit their friends to God, is visible in the Scriptures. Paul and Barnabas, when they came to Derbe, commended the brethren to the Lord, on whom they believed, Acts xiv. 23.

But especially when parents leave their children, they commit them to the care of some faithful person. When old Jacob was to die, he commends his children to the living God, Gen. xlviii. 15, 16, and 49; before Moses left the Israelites, in his swan-like song, Deut. xxxii. and xxxiii., he doth not only command them God's precept, but also commend them to God's protection.

Our blessed Saviour, who is an unparalleled pattern and precedent, being to depart out of the world and go to the Father, would not leave his disciples fatherless. He knew the hearts of his servants were heavy, that their Master was to be taken from their head; alas! what can the chicken do, when the hen under whose wings they used to be clucked and cherished was killed? therefore

he commends them to God, as the greatest good which his boundless love could do for them. 'And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil,' &c., John xvii. 11-16. How affectionately, how pathetically, doth he entreat his Father to take the care and charge of them. Father, keep them, holy Father, keep them, as if he could never speak it enough. How many arguments doth he use to persuade and prevail with his Father to be the guide and guardian of his children! Father, I must leave them, oh do thou love and keep them, that they may not be left alone. Father, I beg not their immediate translation to glory, but only their preservation in an estate of grace; I desire not that they should be kept from the evil *of* affliction, but only from the evil *in* affliction, and shall I be denied? The world hates them for thy sake, and what will become of them if thou wilt not help them?

In the explication of the text I shall shew,

1. What it is for a minister to commend his friends to God, or how this is done.

2. Why it is a minister's duty, and the greatest good a pastor can do for them from whom he must part, is to commend them to God.

First, how a minister can commend his brethren and friends to God. This is done two ways, namely, by prayer and by faith.

1. By a cordial supplication to God, or by prayer. The departing parent appointeth his executor to be careful of, and faithful to, his children, and so commendeth them to him; but the departing pastor entreateth God to be gracious to, and mindful of, his people. As by preaching the minister commends God to his people's acceptance, so by prayer he commends his people to God's benediction. The principal part of the priest's office under the law, was to offer sacrifice, and to pray for the people; Aaron must bear the names of the children of Israel before the Lord. And the main work of us ministers of the gospel is to stand betwixt God and our people, by giving precepts from God to them, and by putting up prayers to God for them: 'On this wise shall ye bless the people, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee,' Num. vi. 23. We bless them when we beg of God to bless them. God blesseth imperatory, by commanding a blessing on men: 'There the Lord commanded his blessing, even life for evermore,' Ps. cxxxiii. 3. Ministers bless impetratory, by commending them to God's blessing.

God's blessing is operative, his *benedicere est benefacere*; our blessing is optative only; we wish the blessing, and that is all, but God can work the blessing.

The apostle Paul usually made prayer the Alpha and Omega, the preface and ending, of all his epistles. If we observe it well, we shall find that each of them is scented with this sweet perfume, Rom. i. 9, xv. 13, and xvi. 24; 1 Cor. i. 3, 4, and xvi. 23; 2 Cor. i. 2, 3, and xiii. 14; Gal. i. 3, and vi. 18; Eph. i. 2, 3, 15-20, and vi. 23, 24; Phil. i. 2-4, 9-11, and iv. 23; Col. i. 2, 3, and iv. 18; 1 Thes. i. 2, iii. 10, and v. 28; 2 Thes. i. 2, ii. 16, and iii. 18; 1 Tim. i. 2, and vi. 21; 2 Tim. i. 2, and iv. 22; Titus i. 4, and iii. 15; Philem. 4; Heb. xiii. 21, 22. Prayer was his salutation, and prayer was his conclusion; nay, as some persons of quality seal all their letters with their coats of arms, so the holy apostle all his epistles with prayer for the persons to whom he wrote, and gives us leave to look on all as forged where this mark was missing: 'The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen,' 2 Thes. iii. 17, 18. All Christians must pray for others; it is their general calling in part. Among the Persians, he that offered sacrifice prayed for all his countrymen, saith Herodotus, lib. i.: 'Pray one for another,' James v. But it is the particular calling of a minister. We must give ourselves to prayer; it must be the element in which we breathe and live: 'He is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee,' Gen. xx. 7. Prophets, of all men, must be frequent at prayer.

But there are some persons which ministers must in a special manner commend to God in their prayers—namely, the people which God hath committed to their special charge. A good house-keeper will relieve and help his neighbours and strangers, but he hath a greater regard, and more tender respect, for his children and those of his own family. Our prayers, like Sir Francis Drake's ship, must encompass the whole world, even all in the land of the living that have not sinned the sin unto death: 'I will that supplications and prayers be made for all men,' 1 Tim. ii. 1. The higher a man is, the further he seeth, and the richer a man is, the more he relieveth; the higher a man is in holiness, the further he seeth into others' indigencies, and the richer he is in grace, the more he by prayer begs the relief of their necessities. But in the wide earth our eye must principally be on God's vineyard, to water that with our tears, and to beg the influence of heaven, for the refreshing and ripening the fruits thereof: 'Praying always with all prayers for



all saints,' Eph. vi. 18. The tongue may well pray for the other members of the same body. Christ hath taught us this in that prayer of prayers, as a father calleth it. 'Our Father.' *Father* speaketh our faith in God; *our* enjoineth charity to our brethren; but in this vineyard our love and labour must be specially for that part of it which is committed to our trust. Of all debts, specialties must first be paid. Prayer is a debt: 'God forbid that I should sin in ceasing to pray for you,' saith Samuel; and in regard of our particular parishes, a bond, a specialty: 'We are bound to thank God always for you,' 2 Thes. i. 3. The minister's prayers, as well as his parts, are the common stock of the parish, in which all have a share. Or as the buckets which hang up in the churches at London, they are useful and helpful to any part of the city as occasion is, but specially for the benefit of those parishes in which they are. We must, as some shopkeepers, drive a trade afar off, beyond the seas, but be sure not to be idle in our shops at home. We must mind others at the throne of grace, but be sure to remember our own people. He that starveth his family, is not likely to feast his neighbours.

2. Secondly, By a fiducial expectation of good, or by faith. We commend our business to a friend when we cast on him the care of it, and trust him with it. Ministers commend their friends and affairs to God, by beseeching his favour towards them, and believing that he will be tender of them. We have many cares and fears about our dear friends whom we do love, and whom we must leave; but faith easeth our hearts by committing them into safer hands. The burden of all the churches lay on Paul, and surely it was heavy enough to have broken his back, had he not learned the art of faith, by which he removed it to stronger shoulders: 'Cast thy burden on the Lord, and he shall sustain thee,' Ps. lv. 22. Here is our charge, and our discharge. Our charge is, to cast our burden on the Lord; and our discharge, he will sustain thee. The apostle praiseth God for the grace given to the Philippians, and prayeth to God for its increase: 'I thank my God upon every remembrance of you. Always in every prayer of mine making request with joy,' Phil. i. 3-5. But mark how he enliveneth his prayer by the soul of faith, knowing that without it, it would be but a dead corpse: 'Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ,' ver. 6.

Our prayers for our people will be to little purpose if faith be not joined with them. There are, indeed, many blessings in the womb

of prayer, but without the midwifery of faith, it will never be delivered: 'Whatsoever ye ask in my name, believing, ye shall receive.' Prayer is the key that openeth God's treasury, but faith is the hand which takes out and receives of his infinite bounty. Prayer must have a promise, or else it is a vessel without a bottom; and that promise must have faith, or else the vessel lieth still, and cannot stir at all. When a full gale of faith fills the sails, then the vessel of prayer launcheth forth most hopefully, and returneth with its riches freight.

When God had acquainted Abraham with his intention to destroy Sodom, Abraham, sensible of his nephew's danger, commends him to God by prayer and by faith, Gen. xviii. 23. Now mark the issue; God remembered Abraham, and brought Lot out of Sodom, Gen. xix. 29. Abraham's prayer hit the mark at which it aimed, but it is because the eye of faith levelled the arrow.

Faith honours God, by committing to him so great a trust as the inestimable souls of his people; and God honours faith, by being true to his trust, and answering fully his chosen's and suppliant's faith. The children of Judah prevailed, because they relied on the Lord God of their fathers. Faith engaged God in the combat, and therefore they could not but conquer, 2 Chron. xiii.

He that prayeth for himself, and not for others, is fitly compared to a hedgehog, who laps himself within his own soft down, and turns his bristles to all the world beside. And he that prayeth for others without reliance on God through Christ for audience, works at the labour in vain, and, like Penelope, undoeth by night all that he wrought in the day. The truth is, we lie to God in prayer, if we do not rely on him after prayer.

So, then, for the preacher to commend his brethren or friends to God, is in brief thus much: To open their cases and conditions to God in prayer, earnestly begging the relief of their indigencies, and believing that through Christ he will supply all their necessities.

In the next place, I come to the reasons why the pastor must commend his brethren and friends to God, and they shall be drawn from these three heads: from God, from the world, and from the brethren themselves. God's propriety in them, the world's enmity against them, and their own impotency, do all require that they should be commended to God's care and charge.

I shall now shew the necessity of commending them to God; that it is the greatest good will appear in the use, because he is the most able, loving, and faithful friend.

First, In regard of God, his propriety in them. None so fit to take care of the child as its father. A brute will venture itself, and encounter with that which is much stronger, in defence of her own. The fearful hen, which hath nothing but flight to secure herself from the dog, will yet hazard a duel against the kite, to protect her little chickens. The blessed Jesus gives this ground why he commends his church to God: 'I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me out of the world; for they are thine,' John xvii. 9. I pray not for strangers, nor enemies to thee, but for thine own people, thine own family, for them thou hast chosen, called, and loved, for they are thine; thy jewels, thy portion, thy temple, thy children. Men in a flame will venture far to secure their own jewels. Naboth would hazard and lose his life, rather than part with his own portion. What cost will some be at, and what care will they take, to keep their own houses in good repair. David would have died, that his own son might have lived. Propriety is a sufficient ground for special protection. God doth, by a general providence, take care of all his creatures, because of his general propriety in them, because they are his creatures. He feeds the young ravens, and satisfies the hunger of the sparrows. He is, upon this account, the preserver of man and beast; but his special providence is exercised about them in whom he hath a special propriety. The saints are his λαὸς περιούσιος, peculiar people, and therefore he hath over them a peculiar protection. Hence his peculiar care is compared to a bird flying over the nest where her young ones are, Isa. xxxi. 5. He abhors him as an infidel who doth not provide for his own; surely, then, he will take care of his own himself. Aristotle saith propriety is the ground of all the toil and labour in the world. If all things were common, every one would be careless; but because it is their own ground, therefore they dung, and plough, and sow it; because it is their own wealth, therefore they work hard to increase it. God hath a propriety in his people; they are his by election. The new creature was conceived in God's eternal purpose before he was born. They are his by redemption; he paid an infinite price for them. They are his by regeneration, begotten by him, and born of him. They are his by promise: 'I entered into covenant with thee, and thou becamest mine. I will be their God, and they shall be my people.' Now, because they are his, therefore they go to him for protection: 'I am thine, save me,' Ps. cxix. 94; and therefore he affords them his special and gracious presence: 'Israel is holiness to the Lord, the first fruits of his increase; all

that devour him shall offend; evil shall befall them,' Jer. ii. 3. None can wrong God in anything that is his at an easy rate.

Secondly, The world's enmity against them. The sheep need some dogs to defend them, that have so many wolves to devour them. They who have many and mighty enemies, surely want some faithful, able friend. This was another ground why Christ commended his disciples to God: 'I have given them thy word, and the world hath hated them; because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world,' John xvii. 14. Father, keep thy children, for they are surrounded with a wicked world, whose tender mercies are cruelties. Alas! what shall become of thy lambs, who are ever amongst roaring, ravenous lions, if thou shouldst not protect them?

The old enmity between the serpent and the woman is not yet, neither ever will be, worn out. There are natural antipathies between some creatures, for which little reason can be given; as between the lion and the cock, the elephant and boar, the camel and horse. The serpent, saith Aristotle, will rather fly into the fire than come near the boughs of a wild ash; but there is a greater antipathy between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent: 'An unjust man is abomination to the just, and he that is upright in his way is abomination to the wicked,' Prov. xxix. 27. The eagle, saith the philosopher, hath continually enmity with the dragon and serpent. Saints are eagles; they have enmity with the serpentine brood, but it is *odium offensionis*; they hate wicked men's sins, but not their persons. They loathe the poison, but not the cup in which it is. As tender physicians, they hate the noisome disease, but pity the patient. Thus the unjust man is abomination to the just; but the wicked hate the godly, *odio inimicitie*, with a hatred of perfect enmity, wishing evil to their persons, and working it to the utmost of their power. They that are born after the flesh persecute them that are born after the spirit. Their rage is so great, that, were their power answerable to their malice, they would cut Israel off from being a people, that the name thereof might be had no more in remembrance.

Indeed every Christian may say, as David, 'They hated me without a cause.' The world hath no just cause to hate and curse the people of God; but there is a reason of all their rage and wrath, enmity and cruelty, against the saints; and that is, because they are saints. Wherefore did Cain imbrue his hands in his own brother's blood? 'Because his own works were evil, and his

brother's righteous,' 1 John iii. 12. The light is burdensome and grievous to owls and bats, and all night birds; the light of a saint's holiness is offensive to sinners, that are used only to the deeds of darkness; nay, the greater the light, the more painful to their sore eyes. Swine cannot endure sweet odours. Those that are unclean, and delight to wallow in the mire of vice, hate the fragrant perfumes of grace. The pleasant smell of spikenard is poisonous to them. Horse-flies are killed with ointments.

Now if saints fight with enemies that are more politic and powerful than themselves, they must be conducted by one that is strong indeed, or they will be forced to leave the field. Besides, it is an engagement to God to help his people, because, for his sake, the world hates them. A prince counts it a dishonour to forsake him who hath ventured his life and lost his limbs in his cause and quarrel.

Thirdly, Their own impotency. They are not able to take care of themselves, and therefore must be commended to another. In the civil law, there is provision made for outcasts; there are some hospitals to entertain them. By the common law, if parents die, there are officers appointed to take care of poor fatherless children. 'With God the fatherless find mercy,' Hosea xiv. 3. Those that are orphans want a guardian. Children which cannot go alone, need their mothers' helping hand. The strongest Christian is but a child, and except God hold him by his right hand, will every day get many falls and knocks. The greatest saint is but a glass without a bottom, which cannot stand any longer than it is held; hence they are compared to a new-born infant, which is both polluted and ready to perish, if none take care of it, Ezek. xvi. 5.

If believers' dangers be temporal, their defence must be the almighty and eternal God, or they are foiled. 'We have no strength, but our eyes are unto thee,' saith 2 Chron. xx. 12. They cannot do the ordinary actions of nature without his assistance, who is the God of all grace: 'In him we live, and move, and have our beings,' Acts xvii. 14. They live in him, and move by him, as they have their beings from him. If the fountain fail, the streams soon are dried up; if God denieth his influence, man droppeth into earth. *Inesse est de essentia creature*, Inherence is essential to the creature.

When spiritual perils overtake them, they cannot hold out without God's protection. When Hezekiah was left but a little in his own hands, how much doth he discover the pride of his own heart. Though Peter seemed so resolute and valiant a captain, as to go

before all the apostles in courage, yet when Christ did but for an hour or two withdraw, how shamefully doth he fly back like a coward! The weak breath of a maid bloweth down the strong castle of his confidence. If God do but depart from Samson, his strength departs also, and the Philistines may make what pastime with him they please. The holiest man is no match for a devil. If our God leave us, our defence is departed from us, and the uncircumcised one will make sport with us indeed.

All our power for sacred performances is wholly from another. 'Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything,' 2 Cor. iii. 4. To think, we suppose, is an easy thing; but unless God help, it is too hard for us. God gave Israel their manna every day, or they could not have subsisted. God must give us fresh supplies of his Spirit in every duty, or they cannot be rightly performed. The greatest fulness of a Christian is not the fulness of a fountain, but of a vessel, which, because always is letting out, must be always taking in. The conduit, which is continually running, must be always receiving from the river. The Christian's disbursements are great and constant; therefore such must his incomes from God be, or he will quickly prove a bankrupt.

Habitual grace itself lieth as water at the bottom of the pump, and cannot by all our labour be raised up till God pour in his exciting grace. The flame doth not more depend upon the fire than we upon God. Things that are weak lean on that which is strong; the wood-vine, not able to stand of itself, elings about the hedge or tree, and thereby gets to some height. The weakest will go to the walls if not protected.

This reason is implied in Christ's petition to his Father: 'Father, keep them.' As if he had said, They are poor shiftless children, that can neither stand nor go without help; therefore they must not be left alone. Alas! they are such pitiful, helpless creatures that any one may wrong them of the legacies which I have purchased for them, and bequeathed to them; they will lose the grace I have given them, and fall into the sins which I have kept them from, whilst I was with them, if they be but one moment out of thine eye and arms; therefore, Father, keep them. If they who were to be endowed with an extraordinary measure of the Spirit were unable to keep themselves, much more unable are we; if pillars cannot stand of themselves, much less can weak reeds.

Having spoken somewhat in the explication, I shall proceed to the application of the point.

First, It informeth us of the piety of a true pastor. He com-

mends his people to God ; this is his character. When others curse their people, and commit them to the devil, he blesseth his parishioners, and commendeth them to God. The mouth of some indeed, like Rabshakeh's, are full of railings, and their tongues are even black with blasphemies against God and his people ; though their curses are but like false fire, which may flash a little, but will do no execution ; but the faithful ministers of the gospel have learned other language—as they are blessed men, so they are blessing men. Some ministers are ministers of Satan ; all their business is to accuse the brethren. They are the saints' enemies, because they follow the thing that good is. Publicans bless them that bless them ; but though the people of God pity them, and pray for them, and beg the blessing of God on them, yet they, far worse than publicans, return cursing for blessing. But true shepherds seek and study the welfare of their sheep. The false mother did not care though the child were divided and slain, but the true mother cried out, ' Divide not the child, in nowise slay it ; for her bowels yearned towards her child,' 1 Kings iii. 26. Ministers are called fathers, and their people their children. Wicked ministers are false fathers, and care not what becomes of their children. The great murderer of souls may slay them at his pleasure, and they will not open their mouths against him ; nay, too too often they help him drive the poor silly sheep out of their pastures to the slaughterhouse. But godly ministers, like true fathers, endeavour by all means the welfare of their children ; they cry out, with Hagar, ' How can I see the death of my child ? ' How can I see the eternal death of my poor, ignorant, carnal neighbours ? They open their mouths, and their hearts too, (for their bowels yearn towards their children,) for their people to God, as the ruler to Christ, ' Sir, come down quickly ere my child die.' Lord, such unregenerate, scandalous children whom thou didst commit to my charge, are at the very point of death. I have acquainted them from thee of the evil and end of their wicked ways, but cannot obtain so much as a sober hearing ; but, Lord, if thou wouldst speak to them they would hear thee ; thou canst open their eyes, break their stony hearts, and make them stoop. Lord, come down quickly ere my children die, nay, die eternally.

Secondly, It discovereth the great privilege of a gracious people. When they are deserted by man, they are commended to God. Those that part them and their pastor cannot part them and their God. ' And now, brethren, I commend you to God.' Though Christians may be left by weak, earthly friends, yet they shall never be forsaken by their Almighty heavenly Father. Christ prayeth

for them in heaven, Christians pray for them on earth ; how rich must they needs be who have a stock in such faithful hands, employed for their use in both worlds. It was the misery of Julian that the church shut him out of her prayers, and that was a forerunner of his sad future doom. It is the felicity of true Christians that they are in all the saints' prayers.

All the felicity of man is bound up in the favour of God, and therefore to be commended to his care must needs be a great comfort. I must tell you no people can enjoy a greater privilege. Israel was famous for this above all the nations on the face of the earth ; 'For what nation is there so great ?' saith Moses, Deut. iv. 7. They that consider Israel's outward condition, may somewhat wonder how Israel should be glorious beyond all comparison. Israel was now wandering in a desolate, howling wilderness, having no food for their bellies but what a miracle must send them in, and no raiment for their bodies but that on their backs. Heaven must rain down bread, or they must perish with hunger ; a rock must be broached to give them water, or they die for thirst ; their clothes must grow with their bodies, and not wear out neither, or they must go naked ; they had not a house to hide their heads in, but some slender tents ; turn which way they will, they fall into the paws of ravenous beasts, or into the hands of men no less cruel. Yet in this barren desert, and in the midst of these distractions, no nation in the world, were their tables never so richly spread, and their wardrobes never so largely filled, can compare with Israel for honour and happiness. But what is the reason ? Truly none but this, God was their patron and guardian. 'For what nation is there so great which hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things we call upon him for ?' Other nations might excel them in number, in treasure, in creatures ; other nations might have honours and pleasures nearer them ; but every nation was inferior to them, because no nation had God so near them. It is the near approach of this sun that causeth a spring and summer of light and gladness, of warmth and delights. That nation from which he departeth, whatsoever they enjoy, have but long dismal nights, and sharp bitter frosts.

When men are said in Scripture to be obnoxious to all evil, they are only said to be forsaken by the chiefest good : 'I have forsaken my house, I have left my heritage,' Jer. xii. 7. But what is the fruit of God's forsaking his house ? Cannot the building stand though the workman be gone ? No, it is tumbling down apace. 'I have given the dearly beloved of my soul into the hands of her



enemies. Many pastors have destroyed my vineyard, they have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness,' ver. 10. When this fence is removed, the vineyard is quickly destroyed. When David would pray his worst against the church's enemies, what doth he beg? 'Let them be confounded,' Ps. xii. 5, or disappointed in all their designs. This is much, to conceive with sorrow and to have hard labour, and then to bring forth nothing. 'Let them be as the grass upon the house-top, which withereth before it be grown up,' ver. 6. Let them perish speedily, suddenly, and irrecoverably. This is more. The former was bad, that they should take much pains to no purpose; but this is worse, that their pieces that they discharge against others should not only miss their mark, but recoil upon themselves. But all this and much more, ver. 8, which the psalmist addeth as an amplification of the latter, 'Neither let them that go by say, The blessing of the Lord be upon you;' this is worst of all. David knew that if they were out of God's care they should be under his curse, and then they should be miserable indeed. As an eclipse of the sun darkens the creation, though the other lights of heaven shine never so brightly, so whatsoever comforts any man enjoyeth, if God be wanting he is miserably woeful. It is Seneca's observation of Alexander, He overcame the Persians, but he slew Callisthines; he conquered to the ocean, but he slew Callisthines, &c. That the slaughter of his friend drew a black line over all his honourable enterprises, and, as too much shadow to a picture, sullied the glory of them. It may be said of some men, they have large estates, but no God; they have high preferments, but no God; they have excellent parts and natural accomplishments, but no God. This want of a God gives a dash to all the other; and, like copperas, turns all their wine, be it never so rich, into ink and blackness.

On the other side, the fruition of God is the greatest favour. As some write of the crystal, that what stone soever it toucheth, it puts a lustre and loveliness on it; so whomsoever God approacheth to, he puts beauty and glory on the soul.

Because the witness of an adversary is a double testimony, let Balaam, who, as some write of a toad, had a pearl in his head, though his body was poisonous, give in his evidence: 'How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!' Num. xxiv. 5. He speaks both by way of interrogation and admiration; their tents were so comely, and their tabernacles so lovely, that their very enemy was affected and ravished with them. But whence came Israel to be such a well marshalled army, that he who came to fight against them, thinks them beyond all compare, nay, doth himself

admire their postures and order, their glory and gallantry? Why, from the presence of their Lord-general. 'The Lord their God is with them, the shout of a king is amongst them.'

The new temple, which the Spirit of God describeth so exactly in its various dimensions, and curious perfections, such as should never have parallel, hath all its glorious privileges from God's gracious presence: 'The name of that city from that day shall be, The Lord is there,' Ezek. xlviii. 35.

It is observable, Exod. xxxiii. 1-4, that God seemeth to make Israel a very gracious offer: 'And the Lord said unto Moses, Depart and go up hence, thou and the people which thou hast brought up out of the land of Egypt, unto a land flowing with milk and honey. And I will send an angel before thee; and I will drive out the Canaanite, and the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite; for I will not go up in the midst of thee, for thou art a stiff-necked people, lest I consume thee in the way.' Yet mark how the people take this bountiful tender: 'And when the people heard these evil tidings, they mourned: and no man did put on his ornaments,' ver. 4. What evil tidings were here, 1. To have an angel their guide and guardian: 'I will send an angel before thee.' Surely that nurse would have been very tender of his Lord's son, his first-born. 2. To have all their enemies conquered: 'And I will drive out the Canaanites.' Might not Israel march along without fear, when God had engaged that all their foes should be thrown at their feet. 3. To be conducted to the goodliest country under the cope of heaven, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to a place that was the paradise of the earth, and the fittest to be the type of heaven. Would not thousands have valued such a promise at a high price? What was there in all this which called for mourning, that the Israelites take it so heavily, and lay it so much to heart? Truly this, the want of God's presence, which could not be made up by all these privileges, therefore Moses prays, 'If thy presence go not with us, carry us not hence. Lord, it is better to be in a howling, barren wilderness with thy presence, than in Canaan without thee.' It is not a glorious angel's being our captain which can give us true comfort; it is not the casting down our enemies that can lift us up in glory; it is not the pleasant land flowing with milk and honey that can please us, without thy presence. If thou leave us, all our Isaacs, do they promise us never so much joy or laughter, are Benonis, sons of our sorrows, and Ichabods, the glory, the honour, the happiness is departed from Israel: 'If thy presence go not with us, carry us not hence.' But here is the privilege of saints, they

have God's presence : ' My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest.'

Thirdly, Here is comfort for Christians ; they are commended to the living God's care. The apostle had little to give his sorrowful friends, but he would speak for them to that King who was able and willing to give them all things. And indeed this was his greatest charity. By bodily alms he had opened his own purse, but by commending them to God he opened heaven's treasury. Paul's prayers were more worth to them than the empire of the whole world. The apostle was a right courtier ; he observed his prince's will, and drew up his petitions according to his pleasure, and therefore knew they should be prevalent. Joab did not doubt of success, when he set the woman of Tekoah a-work, for that which David desired more than himself.

Beloved friends, I esteem it my duty and privilege that I may write after the apostle's pious copy. Ye are the people to which I was first called to be a pastor ; though opportunity hath sometimes been offered for greater preferment, yet I still waived all thoughts of leaving my first love, and removal to any other parish. I have been amongst you these eleven years, and cannot wholly complain that I have spent my strength in vain, and laboured in vain ; some have acknowledged that they are the seals of my ministry, others, that God hath made me instrumental for their increase in grace. God's power hath appeared in my weakness, and his mercy been manifest in my unworthiness, yet, alas ! how many of you have had the dark side of this glorious pillar of the gospel all this while towards you, which is matter of sad lamentation ! Oh how speechless will they be at the day of Christ, who, after so many years' public and private preaching of the word to them, shall be found in a Christless, graceless estate. Surely none sink so deep into hell as they who are pressed down thither under the weight of the gospel.

I must, notwithstanding this ground of unspeakable grief, admire that free grace which hath made me helpful to any one soul's good. Besides that, I enjoyed more of God in his ordinances amongst you, than ever I have enjoyed all my life. I cannot but acknowledge that many of you have had much hearty kindness and respect for me, not only above my deserts, but much above what any parish that I have known or heard of in the county have had for their minister. I may say as Paul did, My joy was the joy of you all that feared God ; but now the providence of God is parting us, I know not better how to speak my love and faithfulness to you than by imi-

tating this holy pattern in the text, and commending you to God and the word of his grace. Indeed, all is in this one God; if he charge himself with you, none can hurt you; if he be yours, everything will help you. When Alexander asked Porus, his prisoner, how he would be used, Porus answered, *Βασιλικῶς*, Like a king. Alexander asked the same question again, he gave the same answer still. Do you desire no more? said Alexander. No, saith he, all is in that one word, (Plut.) If it were demanded of you to whom ye would be commended, I hope ye would answer *to God*, for ye cannot but know that all good is in one God. The covenant of grace is a rich mercy, to which all the crowns and empires in the world are but nits and nothings; but this is the Sun which makes that heaven so glorious; this is the sum and substance of it, 'I will be your God, and ye shall be my people.' The design of the Son of God in his birth and death was certainly high and honourable. It was a noble end that was in the eye of such an agent, but it was no more than to beg and buy of God to take care of man, whom for his rebellion he had cast off: 'He suffered, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God,' 1 Pet. iii. 18. Living David, when his soul was amongst lions, and ready to be torn in pieces every hour, commits it into God's hands: 'Into thy hands, Lord, I commit my spirit,' Ps. xxxi. 4. The dying Redeemer, who knew the worth of that inestimable jewel, his own soul, by the price which he paid for the souls of others, desired no other cabinet to have it laid up in: 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.' To commend you to God is all that I can do for you, and it is indeed all that ye can desire of me. Were you my nearest relations, and the object of never so dear affections, though you were as near and dear to me as my own soul, if I had the strongest engagement to you imaginable, and the greatest obligations possible, I could do no more, I need do no more, than to commend you to God. Therefore give me leave, now I am taking my leave of you, to commend you to God. 'And now, brethren, I commend you to God.'

First, I commend you to his special favour and affection. The good-will of God is such a lump of sugar as will sweeten the bitterest cup; it hath a virtue in it which will turn the smallest liquor into cordial water. The little bird in her small down nest sings pleasantly, when the great birds in their large thorny nests have but harsh voices. The saint in the soft bed of God's special love sleepeth comfortably, when the wicked in their high places, great preferments, for want of this are in little ease. His general love is like the ordinary beams of the sun, which convey light and heat for

the refreshment of all the world. So the Lord is good to all ; his mercy is over all his works ; but his special love is like the beams of the sun united in a glass, which, passing by others, fires the object only. God's love to his new creatures in Christ is burning love ; he hath choice good, and good-will too, for his chosen ones : ' Let me see the good of his chosen. Look upon me, and be merciful to me, as thou art to them that fear thy name.' It is said of Socrates, he prized the king's countenance above his coin.

A kiss from God is of greater value than all the kingdoms on earth. The Christian can travel merrily, though his way be dirty under foot, if the heavens do but favour him, and it be clean over head : If in the light of a king's countenance there be life ; and his favour be quickening and refreshing as a cloud of the latter rain, Prov. xvi. 15 ; what is there then in the light of God's countenance ! If a heathen could say, *Contemno minutos istos deos, modo Jovem propitium habeam*, I care not for those petty gods and demi-gods, so I can have but Jupiter's good-will ; surely a saint may say, I care not for men's frowns, or devils' fury, so I may obtain but the blessed God's favour.

This special favour of God is a pearl of such price, that it was bought with the blood of Christ, and none can beg a greater for themselves or others. This was David's prayer for himself : ' Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me,' Ps. iv. As the single saint, so the church : ' Cause thy face to shine upon thy servants, and we shall be saved,' Ps. lxxx. Believers who love their neighbours as themselves can desire nothing better or greater.

Joseph loved Benjamin entirely : ' His bowels yearned upon his brother,' Gen. xliii. 29, 30. But how doth he shew it ? What doth he request for him ? ' God be gracious to thee, my son.' Daniel, who fasted, prayed, and was sorely affected with the church's afflictions, when he poured out his very heart to God for them, and would sum up all his prayers into one petition ; this is it : ' The Lord make his face to shine upon his sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake,' Dan. ix. 17. The prayer of the high priest for the people was to this purpose : ' The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you,' Num. vi. 24. Affectionate Paul's lips spake the same language on the behalf of his Corinthians : ' The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all,' 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

Now to this God, in whose favour is life, Ps. xxx., nay, whose loving-kindness is better than life, Ps. lxxiii., I commend you, and

my prayer shall be, 'God be merciful to you, and bless you, and cause his face to shine upon you,' Ps. lxxvii. 1.

Secondly, I commend you to his special care and protection. Angels are the church's guardians: 'He shall give his angels charge over thee;' but God himself is captain of the saints' life-guard. He is Lord of hosts.

It was an honour to David, and granted to him by Achish as a special favour, to be keeper of his head for ever; but it is an infinite condescension in the glorious God; yet this office he is pleased to take upon him, to be keeper of his saints' heads, or their head-keeper for ever. Nay, he is known by this name, 'He that keepeth Israel.' And if you would know how he keepeth them, truly so diligently that he saith, 'I keep it night and day'; they are every moment within the view of his favourable eye, and under the guard of his almighty arm, Isa. xxvii. 4; and so tenderly, that he is said to keep them as the apple of his eye, Zech. ii. 8, which is the tenderest piece, the crystalline humour, say naturalists, of the tenderest part of man's body; of which nature is so tender, that she strongly guards it with tunicles. A great blow is better borne on the back, than a small touch on the eye. *Oculus et fuma non patiuntur jocos.*

God's providence extendeth to all his creatures; it is like the sun, of universal influence, but in a special manner it is operative for the safety of his saints:<sup>1</sup> 'He is the Saviour of all men, (that is, in respect of preservation or temporary salvation,) but especially of them that believe,' 1 Tim. iv. Godly men are compared to wheat, wicked men to chaff. Good husbands will not spoil their chaff, but they are specially careful of their good corn. When a fire breaketh out, God may leave sinners, as lumber, to be consumed, but he will be sure that his saints, which are his jewels, shall be saved. The church is God's house, and therefore that shall be well guarded, whatsoever be neglected: 'The eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the whole earth, to shew himself strong on the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him,' 2 Chron. xvi. 9.

The words contain, 1. The universality of God's providence. His eyes walk the rounds; as Satan's feet go to and fro through the whole earth to devour, so God's eyes run to and fro through the whole earth to defend. Diana's temple was burnt down when she was busy at Alexander's birth, and could not be at two places together; but God is present everywhere, at the same time; and therefore his church, which is his temple, can never suffer through

<sup>1</sup> Deus sic curat universos quasi singulos, sic singulos quasi solos.—Aug.

his absence. Though heaven be God's palace, yet it is not his prison. His eyes run to and fro through the whole earth.

2. The efficacy of his providence, to shew himself strong. God fights with his eyes as well as his hands; he doth not only see the people's dangers, but save them from it. When the philosopher, in a starry night, was in danger of shipwreck, he cried out, Surely I shall not perish, there are so many eyes of providence over me. King Philip said, he could sleep safely because his friend Antipater watched for him. God watcheth and wardeth for his people always.

If God forsake a people, every enemy and evil will quickly find them: 'They are bread for us, for their defence is departed from them,' Num. xiv. 9. The outlying deer are shot, while they within the pale are safe. The Romans in their wars used to call out their tutelar gods of those cities they besieged, as judging them invincible while they remained there, but easily won if they departed. When God left the Israelites, though but for a little while, the Holy Ghost said they were naked, Exod. xxxii. 25. How naked? Not for want of raiment or weapons of war, but for want of God's presence and protection, saith Junius.<sup>1</sup>

Whilst God continueth with you, ye are safe; if trials and troubles come, run under the shelter of this shield; if he doth not prevent the evil of affliction, he will protect you from the evil in affliction. When the city of Shechem was taken, the inhabitants fled to the tower. God is a strong tower, Prov. x., that no cannon can pierce, and he is a high tower, which no ladder can scale, no arrow can reach, Ps. xviii.

As it was said of the tribunal of Cassius,<sup>2</sup> that it was *piorum rupes et reorum scopulus*, a rock of refuge to the good, a rock of revenge to the bad; so it may be said of God, he is a refuge for the oppressed saint, a present help in time of trouble, though he wound the heads of sinners.

Now to this God, whose power is an all-sufficient shelter, and whose special providence is sure protection, at whose beck and bidding are all creatures in heaven and earth, who hath infinite wisdom to direct you, and infinite strength to support you, I commend you, and my prayer shall be: The Lord preserve you from all evil; the Lord preserve your soul; the Lord preserve you in your goings out, and in your comings in, from this time forth and for ever, Ps. xii. 1, 7, 8.

Thirdly, In a word, I commend you to his universal benediction;

<sup>1</sup> Non veste, sed gratia et præsidio Dei.—*Jun. in loc.*

<sup>2</sup> Valer. Maxim.

to his blessings in all your undertakings and concernments ; as to his grace to affect you in the midst of the world's hatred, and to his power to protect you in the midst of all hardships, so to his presence to prosper you in all the works of your hands. The fruitfulness of the earth depends wholly upon the influence of heaven. If the sun withhold its heat, and the clouds their moisture, all things decay and wither. The success of all your actions depend on God's benediction. If he deny his concurrence, nothing prospers: 'Except the Lord build the house, they labour but in vain that build it,' Ps. cxxvii. 1. It is lost labour to undertake the keeping up that house which God will have pulled down. It is to no purpose to plough that field which God will have lie fallow. Neither men can help you in civil things, nor the means of grace in spirituals, unless God afford his assistance. Some philosophers tell us that God is the soul of the world ; as the soul is in every part of the body, so God in every part of the world. Sure I am, as the body moveth not, nor any part of it, but as it is animated and acted by the soul, so neither can the world, or anything in it, but as it is enlivened and acted by God. He is the *primum mobile*, which sets all the other orbs in motion.

It is said of David, that he prospered whithersoever Saul sent him, 1 Chron. xi. 9 ; but what was the spring of the watch, which caused all the wheels to move so regularly ? 'For God was with him.' It is his gracious presence alone which gives success to every enterprise.

His blessing can turn not only water into wine, temporal mercies into spiritual benefits, but even poison into wholesome food, every stone thrown at you by your enemies into a precious stone ; he can cause the wrath of men, as the hunter useth the rage of the dogs for his own ends, to work, not only for his praise, but also for your profit ; as a wise governor, meeting with opposite factions in a state, while each studieth and striveth to undermine the other, serveth his own ends, and secureth his own interest by both. The wise and powerful God, while wicked men plot against his people, makes them to conspire for his people. The world's actings are against the saints intentionally, in regard of the malice of their hearts, but they are for the saints eventually, in regard of God's overruling hand. That knife which wicked men endeavour to thrust into some vital part of the believer to kill him, doth but light upon some imposthume, and thereby tend to his cure. The scorching sun of persecution doth but ripen him for a glorious harvest.



Now to this God, who can blow upon all his enemies' plots and they perish; who can breathe with his Spirit upon his people's actions and they prosper; who can cause all his providences to tend to your spiritual profit and eternal peace, I commend you; and my prayer shall be, 'The Lord hear you in the day of trouble, and the name of the God of Jacob defend you; send you help from his sanctuary, and strengthen you out of Zion; grant you according to your hearts' gracious desires, and fulfil all your counsels,' Ps. xx. 2, 3, 4.

For your further comfort, know that this God to whom ye are commended is an able friend, a loving friend, and a faithful friend, and therefore it is the greatest good I can do for you.

First, God is the most able friend. To have a friend at court is a great courtesy, because such a one can command much; but what is it then to have God for your friend, who can command all things? God is able to do more for you than you can ask or think. He is thirty times called *Almighty* in Job; he can do above all expressions, beyond all apprehensions. What cannot he do for you, who made the whole world of nothing, and hangs the massy earth upon nothing?

He is able to defend you from whatsoever is hurtful. There is a dialogue between a heathen and a Jew after the Jews' return from captivity, all nations round about them being enemies to them. The heathen asked the Jew how he and his countrymen could hope for any safety, because, saith he, every one of you is a silly sheep compassed about with fifty wolves. Ay but, saith the Jew, we are kept by such a shepherd as can kill all those wolves when he pleaseth. God can with a breath, a puff, blast all the plots of his enemies, and cause their persons to perish. How happy are they then who have him for their stronghold! The Egyptians had an idol called Baalzephon, lord of the watch-tower, whose office was to fright such fugitive Jews as fled from their masters; but it seems he was asleep when the Israelites marched out of Egypt in a full body. God is pleased to call himself the watchman of his people, but he is such a watchman as neither slumbereth or taketh those short sleeps by day, nor sleepeth, or hath any long sleep by night; his eyes never close; all his thoughts are waking thoughts for the good of his people.

If enemies come before them, he is the Lord of hosts, if behind them, he is their rearward. It was said of the Palladium in Troy, that whilst that image remained there the city was impregnable,

and that till the Greeks found out a stratagem to steal that idol away, they could not take it. Whatever fancy there was in that, this is a truth, that God is the defence of a people, and while he is present they are safe.

Are your dangers bodily? he can bear off those blows. No evil can arrest you without leave from this King. All his servants are courtiers, and thereby privileged persons. He can make a hedge about yourselves, your houses, and all that ye have, as about Job, chap. i. 10, and then neither men nor devils can make a gap for any to enter and injure you. Hesiod speaks of thirty thousand demi-gods that were *φυλακες ἀνθρωπῶν*, keepers of men; the true God keepeth his in a pavilion, as a prince his favourite, from the mischief of others' envy and malice, Ps. xxxi. 20.

If afflictions be near, he will not be far off. He ventures his fortune in the same bottom with his people: 'When thou passest through the fire, I will be with thee; and through the waters, it shall not come nigh thee,' Isa. xliii. 2. If the church be a burning bush, it will not be consumed, because God is in it. As it is safe in the fire, so also in the water; though it be a vessel, as that wherein the disciples were sailing in a rough sea, tossed up and down with tempestuous winds and boisterous waves, nay, filled almost with waters, and ready to sink, yet there is no fear, because Christ is in it; for though he seem to sleep, waiting only for a fit opportunity to manifest and magnify his power, yet when the storm comes, he will be sure to awake, and with his word of command to cause a calm. The church, as Jerome saith of Arcturus, *semper versatur, nunquam mergitur*, is much tossed, but never drowned: 'God is in the midst of her, she shall never be moved; he shall defend her, and that right early.'

God is said to ride on the heavens for his people's help, Deut. xxxiii. 26, 27. That is, either he will come speedily, as the heavens move swiftly, for his people's deliverance; he will not delay till it be too late, but prevent them with his love: or he hath power, and will command all his creatures to be serviceable to his church's safety: 'He rideth on the heavens for thy help.' As a man that rides on a horse can command it or turn it, and wind it with a curb and bit which way he pleaseth, so can the omnipotent God command the heavens and all their host for his people's help. Though enemies come with open mouth to swallow the church up quickly, yet she will be gravel in their teeth; and should they ever take her down, as the whale did Jonah, yet God will force them

to vomit her up again, and make them find, by woeful experience, that she is too hard a morsel for the strongest persecutors' stomachs to digest.

Are your fears spiritual? God is able to be your defence. It is probable your suspicions are great, that you shall fall off or fall away. The world is a slippery place, but he is able to keep you from falling, Jude 24. We are apt to fall on the right hand by its allurements; its rich wine is apt to intoxicate our brains, and make us stumble. We are apt to fall on the left hand by its affrightments; as the silver of its comforts fouls our fingers, so the fire of its cross is apt to black and defile us. Those that travel in rugged ways and on stony lanes often fall, but God is able to 'keep you from falling.' If God keep his hold of you, there is no fear but ye will keep your feet, and your ground too. 'We are kept by his power, through faith unto salvation.' His power and his love are the eagles' wings upon which the saints are carried out of Egypt, through the wilderness, and safely conveyed to Canaan.

He can keep you from falling two ways.

1. He can deny temptations to you, if he see they will be too hard for you. All have not the same faith, therefore all are not tried in the same fire; he may give a strong purge or vomit to a strong man, but will not to a babe in grace. He knoweth whether the armour will bow, and if it will, he can prevent the bullet. He is acquainted with the hardiest soldiers in his army, and them he will call to the hardest service, Rev. iii. 10. When the weather is very bad he will not venture his sickly child abroad.

2. He can enable you to foil the tempter. Little David, in his strength, can conquer great Goliath. He kept Joseph's soul from being so much as singed—miraculously as the three children's bodies—by that great fire which his mistress made to have burnt him. Though the saint, like Daniel, be cast for his conscience into a den, there to fight with, and in danger to be devoured by, lion-like lusts, he can bring him out as safe and as whole as he was cast in. The goldsmith would not venture his gold in the fire if he knew it would be consumed by it. Man is no match for devils, but God over-matcheth them.

Preservation from sin these two ways, Augustine acknowledgeth with much affection. Lord, saith he, when I had a heart to sin, thou didst keep off the temptation, and when I had a temptation to sin, thou didst keep off my heart. If your hearts be as dry as tinder, he can hinder Satan from striking fire; if he suffer the tempter to strike fire, he can make the tinder wet, and hinder it

from taking. As he is able to defend you from what is hurtful, so to relieve you with what is needful; as the fire both purifieth the air, and warmeth them that sit about it.<sup>1</sup> He knoweth that ye are indigent, and have nothing of your own to live upon; but he can send you in such daily supplies as may afford you an honourable subsistence. I have read of one that feasted the vast army of Xerxes. God's estate is infinite, and therefore will bear a liberal provision for all his children. I know you desire proficiency of grace, and perfection in glory, above all the world. He can build you up in grace, he can cause all grace to abound. If this Sun draw nigh to you, the fruits of the spirit will ripen apace. This well of salvation can fill every vessel of your hearts, be they never so wide; he can make the babe of grace to grow till he become a young man, a strong man, and a father. If the nurse be taken from the child, and the breasts be denied it, of which it used to suck with so much delight, he can make it thrive as well with the spoon: in the want of pure public ordinances, he can be a little sanctuary to his saints. He often sendeth them a warm bit up to their chambers when they cannot come down and feed with the rest of the family. He can give you an inheritance that fades not away; he can conduct you through all your hardships, and crown you at last with heaven, where ye shall be kept both from sin and suffering, and freed, not only from foils, but also from fighting; where the love of God shall never be questioned, nor his providence quarrelled; where ye shall never offend others with your purity, nor have cause to defend yourselves from their injuries; 'where all tears shall be wiped from your eyes, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away; where persecutors cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest;' where your names shall be fully vindicated, your infirmities be wholly banished, your graces be perfected, and your souls infinitely blessed, being locked up in the bosom of Christ, and lodged in the embraces of God for ever and ever.

2. He is the most loving friend. Some have power to do their neighbours a courtesy, but tell us they owe them not so much goodwill. God, as he hath power enough to enable him, so he hath love enough to move him to do his people good. Jonathan ventured far for David's safety, and the reason was, for he loved him as his own soul. They who have God's heart, are sure of his helping hand. He chooseth his love, and then loves his choice;

<sup>1</sup> Si esuris, panis tibi est; si sitis, aqua tibi est; si in tenebris, lumen est, &c.—*Aug. Tract. in Johan.*

he had precious thoughts of them before they had any thoughts of themselves.

God loves his people, as they are his eternal choice: the mother loves the child whom she carried nine months in her womb. Oh how, then, doth God love his people, whom he carried in the womb of his purpose from all eternity! He loves them, as they are his own picture, as they are like him in grace and holiness. Men have loved others the more for resembling them in sin; so did Heliogabalus his children. God loves his children the more for resembling him in sanctity. Grace is lovely; God cannot but love his saints, because he loves himself. He loves them as they are his Son's purchase. They which were so dearly bought, are not easily loathed. Jacob was exceeding tender of Benjamin, though he could, as occasion required, expose the ten patriarchs to all weathers; yet by his good-will the wind must not blow upon Benjamin: if Benjamin miscarry, he dieth with him. And what is the reason of this extraordinary affection?—possibly this, Benjamin was the child of his beloved Rachel; Benjamin was dearly bought, he cost the life of his dear wife. So God loves his saints with a singular love, because they are the children of his dear Son, the travail of his soul. His beloved Son had many a sharp throe, and many a bitter pang, before he could bring them forth; nay, they cost him his very life.

He loves them above all the world besides. All others are dross; they are his gold. This whole world was set up as a tent for them to lodge in for the time of their pilgrimage; and when they shall be removed to their Father's house, this tent will presently be taken down. If all the wheat were but gathered into the heavenly garner, the chaff would not be an hour out of the unquenchable fire. He loves them as his own Son, John xvii. 26, 27. Who can tell the love God bears to his Son? The same love he bears to his saints. His name is love, his nature is love, his Son is the token of his love, his Spirit is the earnest of his love, the gospel his love-letter.

Hence it is that they are so happy who are committed to God's keeping, because he is so loving a guardian.

All the while that his people suffer, he doth sympathise, and he will support them. As a tender father he proportions the burden to the strength of his children's back. He doth like a lutanist, to use Chrysostom's similitude, who will not let the strings of his instrument be too slack, lest they mar the music, nor suffer them to be too hard screwed up, lest they break. He who taught the

husbandman to use several instruments for the threshing of several sorts of grain, and not to turn the cart-wheel about upon the cummin, Isa. xxviii. 25, will certainly himself not suffer his people to be afflicted above what they are able, 1 Cor. x. 13.

His love will set all his other attributes at work for his people's good. His wisdom will contrive, his power will act, and his faithfulness will perform whatsoever he promiseth for the comfort of his church, and all because he loveth them. What would not David have done for Absalom, whom he affecteth so dearly? When Absalom rebelled against him and sought his life, his heart relented towards Absalom out of love. What a charge doth he give his captains concerning him!—‘Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom.’ What will not God do for his chosen whom he loveth? When they wander and run from him, he followeth after and wooeth them. ‘For the iniquity of his covetousness I was wroth and smote him; I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his own heart.’ Mark, here is a child in a great crime; his father corrects him, and instead of kissing the rod, he kicks at the hand that holds it—‘He went on frowardly in the way of his own heart.’ Well, what is the fruit of this frowardness? You might expect greater severity upon such contumacy. Surely, if few stripes will do no good, many must be laid on; or if the rod will not do, the axe might be used. But, lo, what love doth! ‘I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts to him and to his mourners,’ Isa. lvii. 17–19. Well, though he be undutiful, yet he is my child; I will throw away my rods, and draw him with the cords of love; though he freeze under the nipping frosts, yet he will thaw under my warm beams.

3. He is the most faithful friend. He is constant in his love. Some are able, and loving also for a time; but their love, like a candle, though it burn a little in a close room and calm weather, is easily blown out by a stormy wind. If a Christian be called to the cross, he is, like the deer that is shot, by the herd pushed out of their company; but God is a lasting, yea, an everlasting friend. His love, like the sun, can never be abated, much less extinguished, by the greatest tempest, but is always going forth in its full strength. ‘A brother is born for adversity; a friend loveth at all times,’ Prov. xvii. 17. Such a friend is God, who, when few men will, never fails to appear for his suffering servants, 2 Tim. iv. 16, 17. Basil ventured very far for a persecuted friend; and being blamed for it, answered, *Ego aliter amare non didici*, I have

learned not to love otherwise. The ancients pictured friendship in the shape of a fair young man, bare-headed, with his breast open, meanly apparelled, with this inscription on his clothes: To live and to die with you; and this on his forehead, Summer and winter; and with this on his heart, *Propè, longè*, Far and near. God is such a friend as will never disown or deny his people. In the furnace the three children shall have his presence, wherever he is absent.

When men are mutable, and appear, as Tertullian saith of the peacock, all in changeable colours, use their friends as we do sundials, look no longer on them, nor regard them, than the sun shineth on them, 'God is a faithful creator,' 1 Pet. iv. 19; will be sure to mind the house that he hath built, and that most of all when it is out of repair and ready to fall. Bucholcerus, upon his friend's going to court to teach the Prince Elector's children, told him, I will give you one piece of counsel which may do you good whilst you live. His friend hearkened to him: I commend, saith he, to you the faith of devils; take heed whom you trust.

Indeed, there are many men like ponds, clear at the top, and mud at the bottom; fair in their tongues, but foul in their hearts. The greatest men's words are often like dead men's shoes, he may go barefoot that trusteth to them. But oh what a faithful friend is God, who never faileth his! He is such a physician as will be sure to visit his patients often when sick, although he may pass by their doors when they be well.

He is faithful to his promise; his word is the truth, Col. i. 5. His church is the pillar of truth, not to bear it up, but to hold it out, 1 Tim. iii; his sacraments the seals of truth; he himself is the Lord God of truth, Ps. xxxiv. 5. Who fears to be deceived when truth promiseth?<sup>1</sup> He keeps his promise to a word; 'Ye know in all your hearts, and in all your souls, that there hath not one good thing failed of all that the Lord promiseth,' Joshua xxiii. 14. The birth of the promise will answer their conception, and they bring forth in full feature and glory.

God is usually better, but never in the least worse, than his word. His promise is equivalent to possession. He keeps touch with his people in the time of performance to a day:<sup>2</sup> 'The self-same day Israel marched out of Egypt,' Exod. xii. 41. The four hundred and thirty years were that very day expired, nay, to a night: Dan. v.

<sup>1</sup> Quis falli timeat cum promittit veritas.—*Aug. Confes.*, lib xi. cap. 1.

<sup>2</sup> In sacra scriptura non solum bonitas est quod precipitur, et felicitas quod promittitur, sed etiam veritas quod dicitur.—*Hugo*.

30. 'In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain.' When the big-bellied promise had gone its full time, the seventy years being then expired, it could not stay till morning for its delivery, but fell in labour that very night, and was safe delivered.

The promises are the flowers of which the cordial juleps are made which refresh you in fainting hours; but as God's love is the root upon which they grow, so his faithfulness is the hand that must bring them to you. It is your happiness that your riches lie in such good hands as God's, and that the public faith of heaven is engaged for the payment of all your bonds; for be confident, he who will not suffer a liar to enter heaven, will much less suffer a lie to enter his own heart: 'Faithful is he that hath promised, and also will do it,' 1 Thes. v. 24.

Thus, my dearly beloved, I commend you to the favour and affection, power and protection, care and benediction, of this God, who is so able, so loving, and so faithful a friend.

But as I desire, and shall endeavour by faith and prayer to commend you to God, so I cannot but hope, and I beg it of all amongst you that have any interest at the throne of grace, that ye would commend me to God: 'I beseech you, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me,' Rom. xv. 30.

Before I conclude, as I have commended you to God, so let me commend you to, and commend to you, the word of his grace. Julius Cæsar being forced to swim for his life, held his commentary in one hand above water, and swam to land with the other. Without question you have more cause to value the word of God's grace. The law breatheth forth a cold blast, a north wind of threatenings, but the gospel sendeth forth a warm gale, a south wind of promises. Grace of all God's attributes must not be neglected; love can least endure to be slighted. Oh let me beseech you, for the Lord's sake, for your souls' sake, to value the gospel. Alas! what are we without it, but condemned malefactors, every moment liable to be called forth and hung up, as monuments of God's fury, in hell! If ever poor creature, in fear every moment of being fetched out of the prison and carried to the gallows, did esteem a pardon, sure I am ye have cause to prize the gospel. O sirs, how had all of us at this day been shut up under the law's curse, in the dungeon of endless wrath and misery, had not the gospel opened the prison doors, knocked off our shackles, and set our souls at liberty!



I commend the word of his grace to you under a fourfold consideration.

First, To purify your affections. I know ye want grace ; now the word of grace can beget grace, and increase grace. It is the usual pipe through which grace may be conveyed into the vessels of your hearts. The laws of men may reform your actions, but it is the gospel of God which can renew your affections. Some poets speak of musicians that by the force of their music can make stones leap into walls, and tame beasts, be they never so savage. The word of God's grace will do much more, it will turn stones into children of Abraham ; it will change a heart of stone into a heart of flesh ; it will tame lions, and turn them into lambs, Isa. xi. 4-6. It hath made the very hearts of them to bleed, whose hands were imbrued in the blood of the Redeemer.

Let your endeavour be, that this word of grace may come with power to your souls, that you may not only hear it, but savour it ; and not only read it, but relish it. Oh, my friends, the lack of this is the undoing of thousands ! What is the reason that some who seemed very fair for heaven, fall away foully, and, as some mariners boast, can sail with all winds, to what haven soever they blow ? Truly this, the gospel, though sometimes it conquered their outworks, never surprised the royal fort of their hearts ; though it darted in some light, yet it was never received in the love of it. Oh, therefore, let me beseech you that ye receive not the grace of God in vain, 2 Cor. vi. 1. Ah, how sad will it be for you if your hearts be like rocks, on which the dews of grace falling make no impression. As the apricot tree leaneth on the wall, but is rooted in the earth, so many seem to lean on Christ, but are rooted in their lusts : the word of grace abused is the condemnation. If grace be your enemy, ye have no friend in heaven or earth. The fruits of no trees ripen so fast, the sins of no men grow so great, as of them that stand constantly in the sunshine of the gospel. If the gospel be not a morning star to you, a forerunner of an eternal day, by ushering in the sun of righteousness upon you, it will be an evening star to you, bringing on you an everlasting night of death and darkness. As the ocean landeth some vessels safely at their happy ports, when it sinketh others, so the word of God's grace will either be a savour of life unto life, or a savour of death unto death.

Secondly, To be the rule of your conversations. Your whole race must be regular, and there is no such rule to walk or work by as the word of his grace : ' As many as walk according to this rule,'

Gal. vi. 16 ; that is, according to the gospel. It containeth not only promises for your consolation, but also precepts for your conversations ; therefore it is called a royal law, James ii. 8. A law, because it is to be the canon of our lives. The law delivered on mount Sinai is by Christ adopted into the family of the gospel. A royal law, because given us by God, the king of the world, who hath sovereignty and dominion over all, and therefore power to command what he pleaseth. The word of his grace is a royal law, because the king's highway, out of which road none may wander under the penalty of rebellion. Indeed, the gospel is a law of liberty, but not a law of licentiousness, James i. 25. It freeth us from the curse, but not from the commands, of the law. A true Christian is not *ἀνομος*, without law, but *ἐννομος*, under the law to Christ, 1 Cor. ix. 21. Look therefore to this royal law ; expound it, and comment on it in your lives.

Let it be your rule for faith. The gospel is the only creed ; he that believeth this is a true believer. As the Word, Christ, is the personal foundation, so the word of Christ is the doctrinal foundation for every Christian to build on, Eph. ii. 19, 20. This we believe, saith Tertullian, when we first believe that we ought to believe nothing beyond the Scriptures. Paul proves himself a true believer, because he believed all things written in the law and prophets, Acts xxiv. 14.

Make it your rule for worship. To serve God according to your own inventions, or men's prescriptions, is rebellion and disservice. As the moth eats out the garment, and the rust the iron, so doth an apocryphal worship in time eat out an evangelical worship, Mat. xv. 7. All worship of God, without warrant, is like private coining money, high treason against the King of heaven. God, though men durst not, charged Jeroboam with this crime : ' He offered upon the altar which he had made, in the month which he had devised of his own heart,' 1 Kings xii. 33. He took liberty to worship, when and where he pleased, not when and where God pleased. Till man can be his own maker, he may not be his own lawgiver. While his dependence is on God, God expecteth observance from him. The gospel is not only a royal law, but a perfect law, James i. 25. It needs not additions or traditions from men to supply its defects. It is horrid blasphemy to accuse Scripture of deficiency. Christ Jesus was faithful in all his house, which he had not been, if the laws he left us were not sufficient for God's service. Those that add to his word, tell us, though not plainly, yet interpretatively, that he was an unfaithful prophet. Friends, I beseech you keep

close to this rule. It will be a good antidote against the infections of the Papists; when the shops are full of adulterate ware, men that would not be cheated will bring what they buy to the light: 'To the law and to the testimony,' Isa. viii. 20.

In all things live by the gospel, and look to the gospel; let that be a light to your feet, and a lantern to your paths; keep the word, and it will keep you, in an hour of temptation from sinning, and in an hour of dissolution from sinking. The lawyer, in his doubts, consults with his Lyttleton or Coke; the physician prescribes by Galen or Hippocrates; the philosopher takes advice of his Aristotle; but the godly man must always take counsel of the gospel: Prov. iv. 26, 27, 'Ponder the paths of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left, remove thy feet from evil.'

Darius would be advised by his Zophyrus, and Scipio would do nothing without his Polybius. Let the law of God be your counsellor, the man of your counsel, as David made it; fear everything which God's law doth not allow.

The hen doth not only fear the ravenous fowls, but runneth away if she see so much as their shadow. Turn not in the least away from God's law, but hate the appearance, and shun the occasion, of evil. Many will labour to keep their credits, and to save their purses; do you labour to keep your consciences, and to save your piety and your souls.

Thirdly, To be your buckler against opposition. The gospel is a magazine, out of which Christians may be furnished with spiritual weapons in their holy war against the kingdom of darkness. Other armour, as of parts and gifts, morality and examples, is, as Alexander said of the Persians, when he saw them come into the field so richly clothed to fight with the Grecians, rather a prey to the enemy than a defence to the soldiers that wear it.<sup>1</sup> It is the word which is a shield against evil principles, Mat. xxii. 29; it may fitly be called, as Augustine sometime was, *Hæreticorum malleus*, the hammer of heresy. He that is mighty in Scripture, is the man that can hit this unclean bird in the eye, and wound it mortally with one blow, Acts xviii. 28. Even women, that are the weaker sex, with this sword in their hands, having learned from the Spirit how to use it, have encountered with great doctors, disarmed them of all their philosophical weapons, and shamefully foiled them. A friar being angry at Luther for spoiling their market, said, that had it not been for Luther, they could have per-

<sup>1</sup> Liv., lib. ix.

sued the Germans to have eaten. Lay aside Scripture, and seducers shall prevail with you to eat poison.

It is a shield against evil practices: Ps. cxix. 9, 'By what means may a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to the word.' It must be a strong curb which can rein in a young man, who is hot and heady, when he is galloping with full career in the road of sin and hell; but the gospel can do it. When a sprightly young man, which is tasting and taking his carnal pleasures, which his youth will help him to savour above others, let but the gospel spread a table before him of his dainties, and let him but feed thereon, and his mouth will be ever after out of relish with all the coarse food and homely fare of this world.

Doth Satan assault you? Eph. vi. 17; use the gospel for your defence. It is not the sign of the cross, but the word of the cross, which Satan feareth; the gospel, like mustard seed, which, Pliny saith, mixed with vinegar, is sovereign against the poison of serpents.

As fencers play sometimes and fight with low weapons, merely to teach their scholars how to use them, so the blessed Saviour, though he could with his deity have driven away the devil, yet fighteth against him with the word, Rev. xii. 11, to shew us the virtue of, and how we should handle that weapon, Mat. iv. 4, 7, 10.

Is the world to you a place of thorns and briars? 2 Cor. x. 4; get your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, and ye may walk comfortably through it. The Irish, some say, tread so lightly on the ground, that they run over bogs in which others stick and sink to their ruin. Though many perish in the world's sloughs and quagmires, yet they that have the gospel shoe on are sure to be safe.

Would it allure you with prosperity to profaneness? this indeed is a most dangerous bait. Adam was conquered in paradise, when Job was conqueror on the dunghill. Whilst the oyster is tossed by the crab, she so claspeth her shell, that she is in little danger of being devoured; but when, without fear, she layeth herself open to the sun, then comes her enemy, and thrusting in a stone to keep her open, with his claws picks her out. But the gospel will yield you a Pisgah sight of Palestine; and what a poor nothing is this whole world in his eyes who is able to look into the other world! He who beheld the recompense of reward, scorned the dignity of being son to Pharaoh's daughter, and, according to

some of the Jewish Rabbis, trampled the crown she put upon his head under his feet.

Would it affright you with adversity from piety? The gospel will shew you that the cross is the path to the crown, and as long as the traveller to a glorious kingdom is in the right way, though it be dirty, he is contented. Christ went to Jerusalem, the vision of peace, by Bethany, the house of grief. *Omnis Christianus crucianus*, saith Luther; Every saint must be a sufferer.

I hope ye will be willing to go to heaven in the same way which Christ and the noble army of saints have all marched in. Besides, the gospel will hold up your heads above these billows, by discovering the gain you shall get by afflictions. Christians, like some other creatures, see best in the night of sorrow and distress. The diamond of their graces sparkle gloriously at the bottom of those waters. When the wind is down, the chaff remains with the wheat; but when it riseth, it bloweth the chaff away.

The word of his grace will assure you of divine supplies suitable to your sufferings; that God, like an indulgent mother, will be sure to tend his sick children, though he leave others to the servants. When Christ had caused Jacob to halt, then the place was turned into a Peniel. Believe me, there is no such joy in the world as the people of God have under the cross, saith Philpot. Israel never saw so much of God as in the wilderness,—then manna from heaven, then the pillar goeth before them, and the rock followed after them.

Fourthly, To be your cordial in all afflictions. The ram's skin covered the ark from the injury of wind and weather, which typified the defence the church hath by the gospel from those miseries to which she is liable on earth. This is my comfort, saith David, in my afflictions, thy word hath quickened me. When the weight of his afflictions was ready to sink him, the gospel, like blown bladders, preserve him from sinking.

Some, I remember, expound that place, 'Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful shower, whereby thou didst refresh thine heritage when it was weary,' Ps. lxxviii. 9. The law was rained down with those heavenly oracles on mount Sinai; while the thunder affrighted the people, the law refreshed them. If the law did revive them in that terrible tempest, what will the gospel do? If his precepts are sweeter than the honey and the honeycomb, how sweet are his promises! If his statutes are the saint's songs, surely the word of his grace is his triumph.

Seneca, going about to comfort his friend Polybius, persuades

him to bear his affliction patiently, because he was Cæsar's favourite. The word of grace affords you infinitely richer cordials, exceeding rich and precious promises, wherein ye are admitted to be the friends of God, the members of Christ, the temples of the Spirit, and the heirs of heaven. The feather of the promise hath dropped in some comfort into a broken heart, when it hath been ready to die with despair, and could take nothing down: 'That ye through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.'

This life would be little better than hell, saith Bernard, were it not for the hope of heaven; but the hope of your future happiness, which is discovered in the gospel, may, like cork to the line, keep your hearts aloft all waters and afflictions.

Now ye have a storm, but hereafter an everlasting calm; now ye are tossed to and fro, and weather-beaten; but faith, by the prospective glass of the gospel, discovers land, and this, without question, may support your spirits.

Therefore, when trouble comes, take heed of fetching your comfort from any creature. Alas! they are all puddle water. It is the word of grace which is the pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, the river whose streams make glad the city of God.

Thus I commend you to the word of his grace in this fourfold respect.

To conclude all, it is reported of a friend of Cyrus, that, being asked where his treasure was, he answered, *Ὁπου Κύριος φίλος*, Where Cyrus is my friend. I hope, if any ask you where your treasure, your riches, your honour, your happiness is, ye will say, *Ὁπου Κύριος φίλος*, Where God is our friend. Now to this God, according to my power, I have, I do, and I shall commend you, to his favour and singular affection, to his power and special protection, and to his care and universal benediction.

I cannot commend you to one so faithful; though others fall off like leaves in autumn, he will never leave you that are his, nor forsake you. I know not to commend you to one so loving; he lived in love, he in our natures died for love. His love is like himself, boundless and bottomless. It is impossible to commend you to one so able; he can supply all your needs, fill all your souls to the brim; grace is lovely in your eyes, whoever beheld it. Glory is infinitely amiable in your judgments, whoever believed it. He can build you up, and give you an inheritance, where all the heirs are kings and queens, and shall sit on thrones, and live and reign with Christ for ever and ever. There ye shall have robes of purity on your backs, palms of victory in your hands, crowns of glory on

your heads, and songs of triumph in your mouths; there ye may meet together to worship him without fear, and drink freely of his sweetest, dearest favour; there your services will be without the smallest sin, and your souls without the least sorrow. If pastor and people meet there, they shall never part more. It is some comfort now, that though distant in places, we can meet together at the throne of grace; but oh, what a comfort will it be to meet together in that palace of glory! But since we must part here, ‘finally, my brethren, farewell; be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind; live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you.’ ‘And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance amongst all them that are sanctified.’