

## SERMON XVII.

Opening the eighth Motive to come to CHRIST, drawn from the sixth Benefit purchased by CHRIST for Believers.

EPH. i. 6.

*To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved.*

**I**N our last discourse we opened to you the blessed privilege of remission of sin, from the following verse; in this verse lies another glorious privilege, viz. the *acceptation* that believers have with God through Jesus Christ; both which comprise (as the two main branches) our justification before God. In the words read, (to omit many things that might be profitably observed from the method and dependence of the apostle's discourse) three things are observable, viz.

1. The privilege itself,
2. The meritorious cause,
3. The ultimate end thereof.

*First*, The privilege itself, which is exceeding rich and sweet in its own nature; "he hath made us accepted;" the word is *εχλαστῶσεν ἡμᾶς*, he hath ingratiated us, or brought us into the grace, favour and acceptance of God the Father; endeared us to him, so that we find grace in his sight.

*Secondly*, The meritorious cause, purchasing and procuring this benefit for us, noted in the words, *ἐν τῷ ἠγαπημένῳ*, *in the Beloved*; which words are a *periphrasis* of Christ, who is here emphatically stiled *the Beloved*, the great favourite of heaven, the delight of God's soul, the prime object of his love: it is he that obtaineth this benefit for believers: he is accepted for his own sake, and we for his.

*Thirdly*, The ultimate end and aim of conferring this benefit upon believers; "To the praise of the glory of his grace;" or, to the end that his grace might be made glorious in praises: there are riches of grace in this act of God; and the work and business of believers, both in this world and in that to come, is to search and admire, acknowledge and magnify God for his abundant grace herein. Hence the note is,

*Doct. That Jesus Christ hath purchased and procured special favour and acceptation with God for all that are in him.*

This point lies plain in scripture, Eph. ii. 13. "But now in

“ Jesus Christ, ye who sometimes were afar off, are made nigh by “ the blood of Christ,” *εγγυς εγγενθησατε*, made nigh, a term of endearedness: nothing is taken into the very bosom and embraces but what is very dear, precious and acceptable; and in Rev. ii. 5, 6. believers are said to be made by Jesus Christ “ kings and priests “ unto God, and his Father,” i. e. dignified favourites, upon whom the special marks of honour are set by God.

In opening of this point three things must be doctrinally discussed and opened, viz.

1. What the acceptation of our persons with God is?
2. How it appears that believers are so accepted with God?
3. How Christ the Beloved procures this benefit for believers?

*First*, What the acceptation of our persons with God is? To open which, it may be proper to remember, that there is a two-fold acceptance of persons mentioned in scripture.

1. One is the sinful act of corrupt man.
2. The other the gracious act of a merciful God.

*First*, Accepting of persons is noted in scripture as the sinful act of a corrupt man; a thing which God abhors, being the corruption and abuse of that power and authority which men have in judgment; overlooking the merit of the cause through sinful respect to the quality of the person whose cause it is; so that the cause doth not commend the person, but the person the cause. This God every where brands in men, as a vile perverting of judgment, and utterly disclaims it himself, Gal. ii. 6. “ God accepteth “ no man’s person;” Rom. ii. 11. “ There is no respect of persons with God.”

*Secondly*, There is also an accepting of persons, which is the gracious act of a merciful God; whereby he receives both the persons and duties of believers into special grace and favour for Christ’s sake; and of this my text speaks. In which act of favour three things are supposed or included.

*First*, It supposes an estate of alienation and enmity; those only are accepted into favour that were out of favour; and indeed so stood the case with us, Eph. ii. 12, 13. “ Ye were aliens and “ strangers, but now in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were afar “ off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ:” So the apostle Peter, in 1 Pet. ii. 10. “ Which in time past were not a people, but “ now are the people of God; which had not obtained mercy, “ but now have obtained mercy.” The fall made a fearful breach betwixt God and man. Sin, like a thick cloud, intercepted all the beams of divine favour from us; the satisfaction of Christ dissolves that cloud, Isa. xlv. 22. “ I have blotted out, as a thick “ cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins.” This dark cloud thus dissolved, the face of God shines forth again with cheer-

ful beams of favour and love upon all, who, by faith, are interested in Jesus Christ.

*Secondly*, It includes the removing of guilt from the persons of believers, by the imputation of Christ's righteousness to them, Rom. v. 1, 2. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand:" for the face of God cannot shine upon the wicked; the person must be first made righteous, before he can be made accepted.

*Thirdly*, It includes the offering up, or tendering of our persons and duties to God by Jesus Christ. Accepting implies presenting or tendering: believers indeed do present themselves to God, Rom. xii. 1. But Christ's presenting them makes their tender of themselves acceptable to the Lord; Col. i. 22. "In the body of his flesh through death to present you holy, and unblameable, and unreprieveable, in his sight." Christ leads every believer, as it were, by the hand, into the gracious presence of God; after this manner bespeaking acceptance for him: "Father, here is a poor soul that was born in sin, hath lived in rebellion against thee all his days; he hath broken all thy laws, and deserved all thy wrath; yet he is one of that number which thou gavest me before the world was. I have made full payment by my blood for all his sins: I have opened his eyes to see the sinfulness and misery of his condition: broken his heart for his rebellions against thee; bowed his will in obedience unto thy will; united him to myself by faith, as a living member of my body: and now, Lord, since he is become mine by regeneration, let him be thine also by special acceptation: let the same love with which thou lovest me embrace him also, who is now become mine." And so much for the first particular, viz. What acceptation with God is.

*Secondly*, In the next place I must shew you how it appears that believers are thus ingratiated, or brought into the special favour of God by Jesus Christ. And this will be evinced divers ways.

*First*, By the *titles* of love and endearment, with which the Lord graceth and honoureth believers, who are sometimes called *the household of God*, Eph. ii. 19. *the friends of God*, James ii. 23. *the dear children of God*, Eph. v. 1. *the peculiar people of God*, 1 Pet. ii. 9. *a crown of glory*, and *a royal diadem* in the hand of their God, Isa. lxii. 3. The object of his *delight* and *pleasure*, Psal. cxlvii. 10, 11. O what terms of endearment doth God use towards his people! Doth not all this speak them to be in special favour with him? Which of all these alone doth not signify a person highly in favour with God.

*Secondly*, The gracious manner in which he treats them upon

the throne of grace, to which he allows them to come with boldness, Heb. iv. 16. This also speaks them in the special favour of God; he allows them to come to him in prayer, with the liberty, confidence and filial boldness of children to a father; Gal. iv. 6. "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father;" the familiar voice of a dear child: yea, which is a wonderful condescension of the great God to poor worms of the earth, he saith, Isa. xlv. 11. "Thus saith the Lord, the holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons; and concerning the work of my hands command ye me:" an expression so full of grace and special favour to believers, that it needs great caution in reading and understanding such an high and astonishing expression: the meaning is, that God hath, as it were, subjected the works of his hands to the prayers of his saints; and it is as if he had said, if my glory, and your necessity shall require it, do but ask me in prayer, and whatever my Almighty Power can do, I will do it for you. However, let no favourite of heaven forget the infinite distance betwixt himself and God. Abraham was a great favourite of heaven, and was called *the friend of God*; yet see with what humility of spirit and reverential awe he addresseth God, Gen. xviii. 27. "Behold now I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes." So that you see the titles of favour above-mentioned are no empty titles.

*Thirdly*, God's readiness to grant, as well as their liberty to ask, speaks them the special favourites of God. The heart of God is so propense, and ready to grant the desires of believers, that it is but ask and have, Matth. vii. 7. The door of grace is opened by the key of prayer. That is a favourite indeed, to whom the king gives a blank to insert what request he will: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you," John xv. 7. O blessed liberty of the sons of God! David did but say, "Lord, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness," and it was done as soon as asked, 2 Sam. xv. 31. Joshua did but say, "Thou sun stand still in Gibeon," and a miraculous stop was presently put to its swift motion in the heavens; nay, which is wonderful to consider, a prayer, yet unborn, I mean conceived in the heart, and not yet uttered by the lips of believers, is often anticipated by the propensiveness of free grace, Isa. lxv. 24. "And it shall come to pass, that before they call I will answer, and whilst they are yet speaking I will hear." The prayers of others are rejected as an abomination, Prov. xv. 8. God casts them back into their faces, Mal. ii. 3. But free grace signs the petitions of the saints more

readily than they are presented; we have not that freedom to ask that God hath to give: it is true, the answer of a believer's prayers may be a long time suspended from his sense and knowledge; but every prayer, according to the will of God, is presently granted in heaven, though, for wise and holy ends, they may be held in a doubtful suspense about them upon earth.

*Fourthly*, The free discoveries of the secrets of God's heart to believers, speak them to be his special favourites: men open not the counsels and secrets of their own hearts to enemies or strangers but to their most inward and intimate friends: "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant," Psal. xxv. 14. When God was about to destroy Sodom, he would do nothing in that work of judgment until he had acquainted Abraham his friend, with his purpose therein, Gen. xviii. 17. "And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do? For I know him," &c. So when a *king* was to be elected for Israel, and the person whom God had chosen was yet unknown to the people, God, as it were, whispered that secret unto Samuel the day before, 1 Sam. ix. 15. "Now the Lord had told Samuel in his ear a day before Saul came:" according to the manner of princes with some special favourite.

*Fifthly*, The Lord's receiving every small thing that comes from them with grace and favour, when he rejects the greatest things offered by others, doth certainly bespeak believers the special favourites of God. There was but one good word in a whole sentence from Sarah, and that very word is noted and commended by God, 1 Pet. iii. 6. "She called him Lord." There were but some small beginnings or buddings of grace in young Abijah, and the Lord took special notice thereof, 1 Kings xiv. 13. "Because in him there is found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel, in the house of Jeroboam." Let this be an encouragement to young ones, in whom there are found any breathing desires after Christ; God will not reject them if any sincerity be found in them; a secret groan, uttered to God in sincerity, shall not be despised, Rom. viii. 26. The very bent of a believer's will, when he had no more to offer unto God, is an acceptable present, 2 Cor. viii. 11. The very intent and purpose that lie secretly in the heart of a believer, not yet executed, are accepted with him, 1 Kings viii. 18. "Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house to my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart." Thus small things offered to God by believers find acceptance with him, whilst the greatest presents, even solemn assemblies, sabbaths, and prayers from others are rejected: "They are a trouble unto me; (saith God) I am weary to bear them," Isa. i. 14, 15. "Incense from Sheba, the sweet cane from a far country" are not accept-

able, nor sacrifices sweet from other hands, Jer. vi. 20. From all which it appears beyond doubt, that the persons and duties of believers are accepted in the special favour of God by Jesus Christ; which was the second thing to be spoken to, and brings us to the third general, *viz.*

*Thirdly*, How Christ, the beloved, procures this benefit for believers? And this he doth four ways.

*First*, By the satisfaction of his blood, Rom. v. 10. "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." No friendship without reconciliation, no reconciliation but by the blood of Christ: therefore the new and living way, by which believers come unto God with acceptance, is said to be consecrated for us through the veil of Christ's flesh; and hence believers have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, Heb. x. 19, 20.

*Secondly*, The favour of God is procured for believers, by their *mystical union with Christ*, whereby they are made "members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones, Eph. v. 30. So that as Adam's posterity stood upon the same terms that he their natural head did, so believers, Christ's mystical members, stand in the favour of God, by the favour which Christ their spiritual head hath, John xvii. 33. "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me."

*Thirdly*, Believers are brought into favour with God by *Christ's becoming their altar*, upon which their persons and duties are all offered up to God: *The altar* sanctifies the gift, Heb. xiii. 10. And this was typified by the legal rite mentioned Luke i. 9, 10. Christ is that golden altar from whence all the prayers of the saints ascend to the throne of God, perfumed with the odours and incense of his merits, Rev. viii. 34. "And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer, and there was given unto him much incense that he should offer it, with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne; and the smoke of the incense which came with the prayers of the saints ascended up before God out of the angel's hand." And thus you see how the persons and duties of believers are brought into favour and acceptance with God by Jesus Christ. The uses follow.

*Inf. 1.* If all believers be in favour with God, how great a mercy is it to have the prayers of such engaged on our behalf? Would we have our business speed in heaven, let us get into the favour of God ourselves, and engage the prayers of his people, the favourites of heaven for us. *Vis unita fortior*, one believer can do much, many can do more: When Daniel designed to get the knowledge of that

secret, hinted in the obscure dream of the king, which none but the God of heaven could make known, it is said, Dan. ii. 17. "Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known unto Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions; that they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret." The benefit of such assistance in prayer by the help of other favourites with God, is plainly intimated by Jesus Christ to us, Mat. xviii. 19. "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." God sometimes stands upon a number of voices, for the carrying of some public mercy, because he delighteth in the harmony of many praying souls; and also loves to oblige and gratify many in the answer and return of the same prayer. I know this usage is grown too formal and complementary among professors; but certainly it is a great advantage to be sincere with them who are so with God. St. Bernard, prescribing rules for effectual prayer, closes them up with this wish, *et cum talis fueris, momento mei*, when thy heart is in this frame, then remember me.

*Inf. 2. If believers be such favourites in heaven, in what a desperate condition is that cause and those persons, against whom the generality of believers are daily engaged in prayers and cries to heaven?*

Certainly Rome shall feel the dint and force of the many millions of prayers that are gone up to heaven from the saints for many generations; the cries of the blood of the martyrs of Jesus, joined with the cries of thousands of believers, will bring down vengeance at last upon the man of sin. It is said, Rev. viii. 4, 5, 6. "That the smoke of the incense which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand:" And immediately it is added, ver. 5. "And the angel took the censer and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth, and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and earthquakes; and the seven angels, which had the seven trumpets, prepared themselves to sound." The prayer of a single saint is sometimes followed with wonderful effects, Psal. xviii. 6, 7. "In my distress I called upon the Lord, and I cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears: then the earth shook and trembled; the foundation also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth:" what then can a thundering legion of such praying souls do? It was said of Luther, *Iste vir potuit cum Deo quicquid voluit*, that man could have of God what he would; his enemies felt the weight of his prayers, and the church of God reaped the benefit thereof. The *queen of Scots*

professed she was more afraid of the prayers of Mr. Knox \*, than of an army of ten thousand men: these were mighty wrestlers with God, however contemned and vilified among their enemies. There will a time come, when God will hear the prayers of his people, who are continually crying in his ears, *How long? Lord, how long?*

*Inf. 3. Let no believer be dejected at the contempts and slightings of men, so long as they stand in the grace and favour of God.* It is the lot of the best men to have the worst usage in the world: those of whom the world was not worthy, were not thought worthy to live in the world, Heb. xi. 38. Paul and his companions were men of choice and excellent spirits; yet, saith he, 1 Cor. iv. 12. "Being defamed, we intreat; we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day." They are words signifying the basest, most contemptible, and abhorred things among men. How are heaven and earth divided in their judgments and estimations of the saints? Those whom men call filth and dirt, God calls a peculiar treasure, a crown of glory, a royal diadem. But trouble not thyself, believer, for the unjust censures of the blind world; they speak evil of the things they know not: "He that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man," 1 Cor. ii. 14. You can discern the earthliness and baseness of their spirits: they want a faculty to discern the excellency and choiceness of your spirits: he that carries a dark lantern in the night can discern him that comes against him, and yet is not discerned by him. A courtier regards not a slight in the country, so long as he hath the ear and favour of his prince.

*Inf. 4. Never let believers fear the want of any good thing necessary for them in this world.* The favour of God is the fountain of all blessings, provisions, protections, even of all that you need. He hath promised that he will withhold no good thing from them that walk uprightly, Psal. lxxxiv. 11. He that is bountiful to his enemies will not withhold what is good from his friends. The favour of God will not only supply your needs, but protect your persons, Psal. v. 12. "Thou wilt bless the righteous, with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield."

*Inf. 5. Hence also it follows, that the sins of believers are very piercing things to the heart of God.* The unkindness of those whom he hath received into his very bosom, upon whom he hath set his special favour and delight, who are more obliged to him than all the people of the earth beside, O this wounds the very heart of God. What a melting expostulation was that which the Lord

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\* Jacobus Songius, the Sorbonne doctor, who wrote the lives of Luther, Knox, and Calvin, speaks as if the devil had hired his pen to abuse those precious servants of Christ.

used with David, 2 Sam. xii. 7, 8. " I anointed thee king over  
 " Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul, and I gave  
 " thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom,  
 " and gave thee the house of Israel and Judah, and if that had  
 " been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and  
 " such things: wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the  
 " Lord?" But reader, if thou be a reconciled person, a favourite  
 with God, and hast grieved him by any eminent transgression,  
 how should it melt thy heart to hear the Lord thus expostulating  
 with thee: I delivered thee out of the hand of Satan; I gave thee  
 into the bosom of Christ; I have pardoned unto thee millions of  
 sins; I have bestowed upon thee the riches of mercy; my favour  
 hath made thee great: and, as if all this were too little, I have  
 prepared heaven for thee: for which of all these favours dost thou  
 thus requite me?

*Inf. 6. How precious should Jesus Christ be to believers, by whose  
 blood they are ingratiated with God, and by whose intercession they  
 are, and shall for ever be continued in his favour?* When the apos-  
 tle mentions the believer's translation, from the sad state of nature  
 to the blessed privileged state of grace, see what a title he bestows  
 upon Jesus Christ, the purchaser of that privilege, calling him the  
*dear Son*, Col. i. 13. Not only dear to God, but exceeding dear  
 to believers also. Christ is the favourite in heaven, to him you owe  
 all the preferment there: Take away Christ, and you have no  
 ground on which to stand one minute in the favour of God. O  
 then let Jesus Christ, the fountain of your honour, be also the  
 object of your love and praise.

*Inf. 7. Estimate by this the state and condition of a deserted saint,  
 upon whom the favour of God is eclipsed.* If the favour of God be  
 better than life, the hiding of it from a gracious soul must be more  
 bitter than death: Deserted saints have reason to take the first  
 place among all the mourners in the world: The darkness before  
 conversion had indeed more danger, but this hath more of trouble.  
 Darkness after light is dismal darkness. Since therefore the  
 case is so sad, let your preventing care be the more; grieve not the  
 good Spirit of God; you prepare but for your own grief in so  
 doing.

*Inf. 8. Lastly, Let this persuade all men to accept Jesus Christ,  
 as ever they expect to be accepted with the Lord themselves.* It is a  
 fearful case, for a man's person and duties to be rejected of God; to  
 cry and not be heard: And much more terrible to be denied audi-  
 ence in the great and terrible day. Yea, as sure as the scriptures  
 are the sealed and faithful sayings of God, this is no more than  
 what every christless person must expect in that day, Mat. vii. 22.  
 Luke xiii. 26. trace the history of all times, even as high as Abel,

and you shall find that none but \*believers did ever find acceptance with God; all experience confirms this great truth, that *they that are in the flesh cannot please God*. Reader, if this be thy condition, let me beg thee to ponder the misery of it in a few sad thoughts.

Consider how sad it is to be rejected of God, and forsaken by all creatures at once; what a day of straits thy dying day is like to be, when heaven and earth shall cast thee out together. Be assured whatever thy vain hopes for the present quiet thee withal, this must be thy case, the door of mercy will be shut against thee; no man cometh to the Father but by Christ. Sad was the case of Saul, when he told Samuel, "the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me," 1 Sam. xxviii. 15. The saints will have boldness in the day of judgment, 1 John iv. 17. But thou wilt be a confounded man; there is yet, blessed be the God of mercy, a capacity and opportunity for reconciliation, 2 Cor. v. 19. Isa. xxvii. 5. But this can be of no long continuance. O therefore, by all the regard and love you have for the everlasting welfare of your own souls, come to Christ; embrace Christ in the offers of the gospel, that you may be made accepted in the beloved.

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## SERMON XVIII.

### The Liberty of Believers opened and stated.

JOHN viii. 36.

*If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.*

**F**ROM the 30th verse of this chapter unto my text, you have an account of the different effects which the words of Christ had upon the hearts of his hearers: Some believed, ver. 30. These he encourageth to continue in his word, ver. 31. giving them this encouragement, ver. 32. "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Hereat the unbelieving Jews take offence, and commence a quarrel with him, ver. 33. "We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man." We are of no slavish extraction; the blood of Abraham runs in our veins. This scornful boast of the proud Jews, Christ confutes, ver. 34. where he distinguisheth on a two-fold bondage; one to men, ano-

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\* If any one desires to know the will of God, let him be a friend of God. *Aug.*