

witness against me, that I am utterly void and destitute of all that saving grace, and a mere stranger to the regenerating work of the Spirit, without which there can be no well bottomed hope of salvation? And if so, are not the tokens of death upon me? Am not I a person marked out for misery? And shall I sit still in a state of so much danger, and not once strive to make an escape from the wrath to come? Is this vile body worth so much toil and labour to support and preserve it? And is not my soul worth as much care and diligence to secure it from the everlasting wrath of the great, just, and terrible God? O that the consideration of the wrath to come, the multitudes all the world over preparing as fuel for it, and the door of opportunity yet held open to souls by the hand of grace to escape that wrath, might prevail with thy heart, reader, to strive, and that to the uttermost, to secure thy precious soul from the impending ruin.

EPH. v. 16.

—*Redeeming the time (or opportunity) because the days are evil.*

TIME is deservedly reckoned among the most precious mercies of this life; and that which makes it so valuable are the commodious seasons and opportunities for salvation which are vouchsafed to us therein: opportunity is the golden spot of time, the sweet and beautiful flower, growing upon the stalk of time*. If time be a *ring* of gold, opportunity is the rich *diamond* that gives it both its value and glory. The apostle well knew the value of time; and seeing how prodigally it was wasted by the most, doth therefore in this place, earnestly press all men to redeem, save, and improve it with the utmost diligence. In this, and the former *verse*, we have,

1st, The duty enjoined, *Walk circumspectly.*

2dly, The *injunction* explained;

1. More generally, *Not as fools, but as wise.*

2. More particularly, *Redeeming the time.*

3. The exhortation strongly enforced with a powerful motive, *Because the days are evil.*

Among these particulars, my discourse is principally concerned about the redemption of time, or opportunities, which in this life are graciously vouchsafed us, in order to that which is to come: And here it will be needful to enquire,

* Καίρος αὐτοῦ χρόνος.

1. What the apostle means by *time*.

2. What by *the redemption of time*.

1. Time is taken more largely and strictly according to the double acceptation of the Hebrew word מָוֶלֶד which signifies sometimes *time*, and sometimes *occasion, season, or opportunity*, and accordingly is expressed by $\chi\rho\omicron\nu\nu\varsigma$ and $\kappa\alpha\iota\rho\omicron\varsigma$, *tempus* and *tempestivitas*: the latter is the word here used, and denotes the commodiousness and fitness of some parts of time above others, for the successful and prosperous management and accomplishment of our main and great business here, which is to secure our interest in Christ, and glorify God in a course of fruitful obedience. For these great and weighty purposes our time is graciously lengthened out, and many fit opportunities presented us in the revolutions thereof.

2. By the *redemption of time**, we must understand the study, care, and diligence of Christians, at the rate of all possible pains, at the expence of all earthly pleasures, ease, and gratifications of the flesh, to rescue their precious seasons, both of salvation and service, out of the hands of temptations, which so commonly rob unwary souls of them. Satan trucks with us for our time, as we did at first with the silly Indians for their gold and diamonds, who were content to exchange them for glass-beads, and tinsel-toys. Many fair seasons are forced, or cheated out of our hands, by the importunity of earthly cares, or deceitfulness of sensual pleasures: at the expence and loss of these, we must redeem and rescue our time for higher and better uses and purposes. We must spend these hours in prayer, meditation, searching our hearts, mortifying our lusts, which others do, and our flesh fain would spend, in sensual pleasures and gratifications of the fleshly appetite. If ever we expect to win the port of glory, we must be as diligent and careful as seamen are, to take every gale that blows, directly or obliquely, to set them forward in their voyage. The note from hence is this:

Doct. *That the wisdom of a Christian is eminently discovered in saving and improving all opportunities in this world, for that world which is to come.*

God hangs the great things of eternity upon the small wires of times and seasons in this world: that may be done, or neglected in a day, which may be the ground-work of joy or sorrow to all eternity. There is a nick of opportunity which gives both success and facility to the great and weighty affairs of the soul as well as body; to come before it, is to seek the bird before it be hatched;

* $\text{Εξ} \alpha\gamma\omicron\rho\alpha\zeta\omicron\mu\epsilon\nu\iota \tau\omicron\nu \kappa\alpha\iota\rho\omicron\nu.$

and to come after it, is to seek it when it is fled. There is a two-fold season, or opportunity of salvation.

1. One was Christ's season for the purchase of it.

2. The other is ours for the application of it.

1. Christ had a season assigned him for the impetration and purchase of our salvation; so you hear his Father bespeaking him, Isa. xlix. 8. "Thus saith the Lord, in an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in the day of salvation have I helped thee," בערת רען, *in tempore opportuno voluntatis, vel placito*. It was the wisdom of the Lord Jesus Christ to set in with the Father's time, to comply with his season: and it became a day of salvation, because it was the acceptable time which Christ took for it.

2. Men have their seasons and opportunities for the application of Christ and his benefits, to their own souls: 2 Cor. vi. 1, 2. "We then as workers together with God, beseech you also, that you receive not the grace of God in vain; for he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee. Behold, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." He exhorts the Corinthians not to dally or trifle any longer in the great concerns of their salvation; for now, saith he, is your day. Christ had his day to purchase it, and he procured a day also for you to apply it, and this is that day; you enjoy it, you live under it: that golden day is now running: O! see that you frustrate not the design thereof, by receiving the gospel-grace in vain.

Now two things concur to make a fit season of salvation to the souls of men.

1. The external means and instruments.

2. The agency of the Spirit internally by, or with those external means.

1. Men have a season of salvation, when God sends the means and instruments of salvation among them. When the gospel is powerfully preached among a people, there is a door opened to them: 2 Cor. ii. 12. "When I came to Troas to preach the gospel, a door was opened to me of the Lord." God, as it were, unlocks the door of heaven by the preaching of the gospel: Souls have then an opportunity to step in and be saved.

2. But yet it is not a *wide and effectual door* (as the apostle phrases it, 1 Cor. xvi. 9.) till the Spirit of God joins with, and works upon the heart by those external means and instruments; as the waters of the pool of Bethesda had no inherent senative virtue in themselves, until the angel of the Lord descended and troubled them: but both together make a blessed season for the souls of men. Then he stands at the door, and knocks, by convictions and persuasions, Rev. iii. 20. strives with men as he did with the old

world by the ministry of Noah, Gen. vi. 3. Now the door of opportunity is indeed opened: but this will not always last; there is a time when *the Spirit ceases to strive*, and when *the door is shut*, Luke xiii. 25.

There is a season, when by the fresh impression of some *ordinance* or *providence* of God, men's hearts are awakened, and their affections stirred. It is now with the souls of men as it is with fruit trees in the spring, when they put forth blossoms; if they knit and set, fruit follows, if they be nipt and blasted, no fruit can be expected. For all convictions and motions of the affections are to grace, much the same thing as blossoms are to fruit, which are but the rudiments thereof, *fructus imperfectus et ordinabilis*, somewhat in order to it; and look, as that is a critical and hazardous season to trees, so is this to souls. I do not say it is in the power of any soul to make the work of the Spirit effectual and abiding, by adding his endeavours to the Spirit's motions; for then conversion would not be the free and arbitrary act of the Spirit, as in John iii. 8. neither would souls be born of God, but of the will of man, contrary to John i. 13. And yet it is not to be thought or said, that men's endeavours and strivings are altogether vain, needless, and insignificant; because, though they cannot make God's grace effectual, his grace can make them effectual; they are our duty, and God can bless them to our great advantage. Now there are, among others, five remarkable essays, efforts, or strivings of a soul under the impression and hand of the Spirit, that greatly tend to the fixing, settling, and securing of that great work on the soul; and it is seldom known any soul miscarries in whom these things are found.

1. Deep, serious, and fixed consideration, which lets conviction deep into the soul, and settles it, and roots it fast in the heart, Psal. cxix. 59. "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies." There are close and anxious debates in those souls in whom convictions prosper to full conversion: they sit alone, and think close to their great and eternal concerns: they carry their thoughts back to the evils of their life past, then smite on the thigh, and cry, *What have I done?* They run their thoughts forward into eternity, and that to a great depth, and then cry, "What shall I do to be saved?" They deliberate and weigh, in their most advised thoughts, what is to be done, and that speedily, for escaping wrath to come: thus they fix those tender, weak, and hazardous motions, which die away in multitudes of souls; and, in the loss of them, the seasons of salvation are also lost.

2. The first stirrings and motions of the Spirit upon men's hearts, do then become a season of salvation to them, when they are accompanied with spiritual, fervent, and frequent prayer: so

it was with Paul, Acts ix. 11. "Behold he prayeth." It is a good sign when souls get alone, and effect privacy and retirement, to pour out their fears, sorrows, and requests unto God. It is in the espousals of a soul to Christ, as it is in other marriages; a third person may make the motion, and bring the parties together, but they only betwixt themselves must conclude and agree the matter. Prayer is the first breath which the new creature draws in, and the last (ordinarily) it breathes out in this world. This nourishes and maturates those weak, tender, and first motions after God, and brings them to some consistence and fixedness in the soul.

3. Then do those motions of the Spirit on men's hearts make a season of salvation to them, when they remain and settle in the heart, and are in them *per modum quietus*, by way of rest and abode, following the man from place to place, from day to day; so that whatever unpleasing diversions the necessities and incumbrances of this world at any time give, yet still they return again upon the heart, and will not vanish or suffer any longer suspension: but in others, who lose their blessed advantage and season, it is quite contrary; James i. 23, 24. "They are as one that seeth his natural face in a glass, and goeth away and forgetteth what manner of man he was:" He sees some spot on his face, or disorder in his band, which he purposeth to correct; but by one occurrence or another, he forgets what he saw in the glass, and so goes all the day with his spot upon him. This was an evanid light purpose, which came to nothing for want of a present execution; just so it is with many in reference to their great concerns: but if the impression abide in its strength, if it return, and follow the soul, and will not let it be quiet, it is like then to prosper, and prove the time of mercy indeed to such a soul.

4. An anxious solicitude and inquisitiveness about the means and ways of salvation, speaks an effectual door of salvation to be set open to the souls of men, Acts ii. 37. and xvi. 30. "Sirs, what must I do to be saved? Men and brethren, what shall we do?" q. d. we are in a miserable condition: Oh, you the ministers of Christ, instruct, counsel, and shew us what course to take! Is there no balm in Gilead? no door of hope in this valley of Achor? Alas! we are not able to dwell with our own fears, terrors, and presages of wrath to come. Oh for a messenger, one among a thousand, to teach us the way of salvation. Thus the Lord rivets and fixes those motions in some souls, that vanish like a morning mist or dew in others.

5. Lastly, That which secures and completes this work, is the execution of those purposes and convictions, by falling, without delay, to the work of faith and repentance in good earnest, dally-

ing no more with so great a concern, standing no longer at *shall I? shall I?* when mean while time flies away, and opportunities may be lost: but bring their thoughts and debates to a peremptory resolution, as the *Lepers* at Samaria did; and seeing themselves shut up to one only door of hope, there they resolve to take their station, lying at the feet of Jesus Christ, and casting their poor burdened souls upon him, whatever be the issue. When the Spirit of God ripens the first motions to this, and carries them through that critical season thus far, there is an effectual door of opportunity opened indeed: this is an acceptable time, a day of salvation: but oh! how many thousands miscarry in this season, and like trees removed from one soil to another, die in the removal!

But certainly, it is the most solemn and important concern of every soul to watch upon all these seasons of salvation, when God comes nigh to them by convictions and motions of his Spirit; and to put the same value upon these things that they do upon their souls, and the salvation of them. This is the door of hope set open, a fresh gale to carry you home to your port of glory. Salvation is now come nigh to your souls; there is but a little betwixt you and blessedness. Wise and happy is that soul which knows and improves its season. To persuade and press men to discern and improve such seasons as these, is the principal work of the preachers of the gospel, and that special work to which I now address myself, in the following motives and arguments.

Arg. 1. And first, who, that hath the free exercise of reason, and the sense of a future eternal estate, would carelessly neglect any season of salvation, whilst he seeth all the rational world so carefully attending, and watching all opportunities to promote and secure their lower concerns and designs for the present life?

Is not the saving a man's soul as weighty a concern as the getting of an estate? You cannot but observe how careful merchants are, to nick the opportunity which promiseth them a good turn; how do poor seamen look out for a wind to waft them to their port, and industriously shift their sails, to improve every flaw that may set them on their voyage; how many miles tradesmen will travel to be in season at a fair, to put off, or purchase goods to their advantage: No entertainments, recreations, or importunities of friends can prevail with any of these, to lose a day on which their business depends; all things must give way to their business; they all understand their seasons, and will not be diverted. But, alas! what childish toys are all these, compared with their salvation! what is the loss of a little money to the loss of a man's soul? If a man's life depended upon his being at such a place, by such a precise hour, sure he would not oversleep his time that morning; and

had he but the least fear of coming too late, every stroke of the clock would strike to his heart; and yet remissness and carelessness, in such a case as this, is infinitely more excusable than in the matter of salvation. Certainly the solicitude and care of all the world for the interests thereof, yea, your own diligence and circumspection in temporal things, will be an uncontrollable and confounding self-conviction to you in the day of your account, and leave you without plea or apology for your supine neglects of the seasons of salvation.

Arg. 2. The consideration of the uncertainty and slippery nature of these spiritual seasons, must awaken in us all care and diligence to secure and improve them: This nick of opportunity is *tempus labile*, a slippery season; it is but short in itself, and very uncertain: "To-day, whilst it is said to-day (saith the apostle) if ye will hear "his voice," Heb. iii. 15. q. d. You have now a short, uncertain, but most precious and valuable season for your souls, lay hold on it whilst it is called *to-day*; for if this season be let slip, the time to come is called by another name, that is not *to-day*, but *to-morrow*. Your time is the *present time*; take heed of procrastinating and putting it off, till that which is called *to-day*, (which is your *only season*) be past and gone. The precious inch of time, though it be more worth than all the other greater parts and portions of your time, yet it is as much *in fluxu*, in hasty motion, and spending as other parts of time are; and being once lost, is never more to be recalled or recovered. Few men know, or understand it whilst it is current: other seasons for natural, or civil actions are known and stated, but the time of grace is not so easily discerned, and therefore commonly mistaken, and lost: And this comes to pass partly through,

1. Presumptuous hopes.

2. Discouraging fears.

1. Presumptuous hopes, which put it too far forth, and persuade us this season is yet to come; that we have time before us, and that *to-morrow* shall be as *to-day*. "Thus through presumption*, "men hope, and by their presumptuous hopes they perish." This is the ruin of most souls that perish.

2. Discouraging fears put it too far back, and represent it as long since past and gone, whilst it is yet in being, and in our hands. By such pangs of desperation, Satan cuts the nerves of industry and diligence, and causes souls to yield themselves as by consent for lost, and hopeless, even whilst the gospel is opening their eyes, to see their sin and misery, which is a part of the work in order to their recovery. Thus the eyes of thousands are dazzled that they

* *Præsumendo sperant, et sperando pereunt.*

cannot discern the season of mercy, and so it slides from them as if it had never been.

God came near to them in the means of their conversion, yea, and nearer in the motions of his Spirit upon their consciences and affections; but they knew not the time of their visitation, and now the things of their peace are hid from their eyes. Had those convictions been obeyed, and those purposes that were begotten in their hearts, been followed by answerable executions of them, happy had they been to all eternity: But their careless neglects have quenched them, and the door is shut; and who knows whether it may be opened any more? O dally not with the Spirit of God, resist not his calls! his motions on the soul are tender things; they may soon be quenched, and never recovered.

Arg. 3. Neglect not the seasons of mercy, the day of grace, because opportunity facilitates the great work of your salvation; it is much easier to be done in such a season than it can be afterwards: An impression is easily made on wax, when melted, but stay till it be hardened, and if you lay the greatest weight on the seal, it leaves no impression upon it. Much so it is with the heart, there is a season when God makes it soft and yielding, when the affections are thawed, and melted under the word; conscience is full of sense and activity, the will pliable: Now is the time to set in with the motions of the Spirit; there is now a gale from heaven, if you will take it, and if not, it tarries not for man, nor waits for the sons of men: Neglect of the season is the loss of the soul. The heart, like melted wax, will naturally harden again, and then to how little purpose are your own feeble essays? Heb. iii. 15. It is both easy and successful striving when the Spirit of God strives in you, and with you; you are now workers together with God, and such work goes on smoothly and sweetly; that which is in motion is easily moved; but if once the heart is set, you may labour to little purpose.

Arg. 4. The infinite importance and weight of salvation, is alone, instead of all motives and arguments, to make men prize and improve every proper season for it. It is no ordinary concern, it is your life, yea, it is your eternal life; the solemnity and awfulness of such a business as this is enough to swallow up the spirit of man. O what an awful sound have such words as these, Ever with the Lord? Suppose you saw the glory of heaven, the full reward of all the labours and sufferings of the saints, the blessed harvest of all their prayers, tears, diligence, and self-denial in this world; or suppose you had a true representation of the torments of hell, and could but hear the wailings of the damned, for the neglect of the season of mercy, and their passionate, but vain wishes for one of those days which they have lost: Would you think any care, any

pains, any self-denial too much, to save and redeem one of these opportunities? Surely you would have a far higher estimation of them than ever you had in your lives.

A trial for a man's whole estate is accounted a solemn business among men; the cast of a dye for a man's life is a weighty action, and seldom done without anxiety of the mind, and trembling of the hand: Yet both these are but children's play compared with salvation-work.

Three things put an unspeakable solemnity upon this matter; it is the precious soul, which is above all valuation, that lies at stake, and is to be saved, or lost. The saving or losing of it is not for a time, but for ever; and this is the only season in which it will be eternally saved or cast away: All hangs upon a little inch of time, which, being over-slipt and lost, is never more to be recalled or recovered. *Lord! with what serious spirits, deep and weighty considerations, fears, and tremblings of heart, should men and women attend the seasons of their salvation!*

Believe it, reader, since thy soul projected its first thoughts, there never was a more weighty and concerning subject than this presented to thy thoughts. O! therefore, let not thy thoughts trifle about it, and slide from it as they use to do in other things of common concernment.

Arg. 5. If we set any value on the true pleasure of life, or solid comfort of our souls at death, let us by no means neglect the special seasons and opportunities of salvation we now enjoy.

These two things, the pleasure of life, and comforts in death, should be prized by every man more than his two eyes; certainly no being at all is more desirable than a being without these: Take away the true, spiritual pleasure of life, and you level the life of man with the beast that perisheth; and take away the hope and comfort of the soul in death, and you sink him infinitely below the beasts, and make him a being only capable of misery for ever.

Now there can be no true, spiritual pleasure found in that soul that has neglected and lost his only season of salvation: All the solid delight and comfort of life results from the settlement and security of a man's great concern in the proper season thereof. The true mirth of the *converted Prodigal* bears date from the time of his return, and *reconciliation to his father*, Luke xv. 24. Two things are absolutely pre-requisite to the comfort of life, *viz. a change of the state by justification, and a change of the frame and temper of the heart by sanctification.* To be in a pardoned state, is a matter of all joy, Mat. ix. 2. and "to be spiritually minded is life and peace," Rom. viii. 6. No good news comes to any man before this; and no bad news can sink a man's heart after this.

And for hope and comfort in death, let none be fond to expect

it, till he has first complied with, and obeyed God's call in the time thereof: A careless life never did, nor never will produce a comfortable death. What is more common among all that die, not stupid and senseless, as well as unregenerate and christless, than the bitter, dolorous complaints of their mis-spent time, and losing their seasons of mercy? *Reader, if thou wouldst not feel that anguish thou hast seen and heard others to be in on this account, know the time of thy visitation, and finish thy great work whilst it is day.*

Arg. 6. Neglect no season of salvation which is graciously afforded you, because your time is short; death and eternity are at the door. "You know that you must shortly put off these tabernacles," 2 Pet. i. 13, 14. that when a few years are come, you "shall go the way whence you shall not return," Job xvi. 22. All the living are listed soldiers, and must conflict, hand to hand, with that dreadful enemy death, and there is no discharge in that war, Eccles. viii. 8. It will be in vain to say, You are not willing to die; for willing, or unwilling, away you must go, when death calls you. It will be as vain to say, You are not ready; for ready or unready you must be gone when death comes. Your readiness to die would indeed be a cordial to your hearts in death; but then you must improve and ply the time of life, and husband your opportunities diligently; carelessness of life, and readiness for death are inconsistent, and exclusive of each other. The bed is sweeter to none than the hard labourer, and the grave comfortable to none but the laborious Christian. You know nothing can be done by you after death; the *compositum* is then dissolved; you cease to be what you were, to enjoy the means you had, and to work as you did. O therefore slip not the only season you have, both of attaining the end of life, and escaping the danger and hour of death.

The USE.

I shall close all with a word of exhortation, persuading (if possible) the careless and unthinking neglecters of their precious time and souls, to awake out of that deep and dangerous security in which they lie fast asleep on the very brink of eternity, and "to-day, whilst it is yet called to-day," to hear God's voice calling them to repentance and faith, and thereby to Christ and everlasting blessedness. "Behold, he yet stands at the door, and knocks," Rev. iii. 20. The door of hope is not yet finally shut, there are yet some stirrings at certain times in men's consciences: God comes near them in his word, and in some rousing acts of providence, the death of a near relation, the seizure of a dangerous disease, the blasting and disappointment of a man's great design and project for this world, a fall into some notorious sin; these, and many such like methods of providence, as well as the

convincing voice of the word, have the efficacy of an awakening voice to men's drowsy consciences; and if careless sinners would but attend to them, and follow home those motions they make upon their hearts, who knows to what these weak beginnings might rise and prosper? The souls of men are, as it were, embarked in the calls of God, your life is bound up in them; if these are lost, your souls are lost; if these abide upon you, and grow up to sound conversion, you are saved by them. More particularly consider,

1. What a mercy it is, to have your lot providentially cast under the gospel; to be born under, and bred up with the means and instruments of conversion and salvation. We have lived from our youth up, under the calls of God, and within the joyful sound of the gospel; "God hath not dealt so with other nations," Psal. cxlvii. 20. Though others should seek the means of life, they cannot find them; and though you seek them not, you can hardly miss them.

2. How great a mercy it is, to have your lives lengthened out hitherto by God's patience under the gospel! that neither that golden lamp, nor the lamp of your life, (both which are liable to be extinguished every moment) are yet put out. Thousands and ten thousands, your contemporaries, are gone out of the hearing of the voice of the gospel, they shall never hear another call; the treaty of God is ended with them; the master of the house is risen up, and the doors are shut. Your neglects and provocations have not been inferior to theirs: but the patience and goodness of God has exceeded and abounded to you beyond whatever it did to them.

3. Bethink yourselves what an aggravation of your misery it will be, to sink into hell with the calls of God sounding in your ears! to sink into eternal misery, betwixt the tender, out-stretched arms of mercy! this is the hell of hell, the emphasis of damnation, the racking engine on which the consciences of the damned are tortured. "And thou Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shall be brought down to hell, Matth. xi. 23. Such a fall, after so high an exaltation, is the very strappado which will torment your consciences. Hell will prove a cooler and milder place to the Heathens that never enjoyed your light, means, and mercies in this world, than it will to you. None sink so deep into misery in the world to come, as they that fall from the fairest opportunities of salvation in this world.

4. Let no man expect that God will hear his cries and intreaties in time of misery, who neglects and slights the calls of God in time of mercy. God calls, but men will not hear: the day is coming, "when they shall cry, but God will not hear," Prov. i. 24, 25.

“ Will God hear his cry, when trouble cometh upon him? Job xxvii. 9. No; he will not: and this is but a just retribution from the righteous God, whose calls and counsels men have set at nought. But whatever men now think of it, it is certainly the greatest misery incident to men in all the world: for as no words can make another fully sensible what a privilege it is to have the ear, favour, pity, and help of God in a day of straits; so it is impossible for any words to express the doleful state and case of that soul whom God casts off in trouble, and whose cries he shuts out.

5. Beware of neglecting any call of God, because that call you are now tempted to neglect, may be the last call that God ever intends to give your souls. Sure I am, there is a call which will be the last call of God to rebellious sinners, and after that no more calls, but an eternal deep silence: *his Spirit shall not always strive with men*; and the more motions and calls you have already slighted, the more probable it is that this may be the last voice of God in a way of mercy to thy soul: and what if, after this, God should seal up thy heart, and judicially harden it? make thy will utterly inflexible, and thine ears deaf, as he threatens, Isa. vi. 10. What an undone, miserable man or woman art thou then! Oh! beware of provoking the sorest of all judgments, by persisting any longer in a course of rebellion against light and mercy.

6. Whilst your hearts put off and neglect the calls of God, you can by no means arrive to the evidence and assurance of your election; for your election is only secured to you by your effectual calling, 2 Pet. i. 10. There is no way for men to discern their names written in the book of life, but by reading the work of sanctification in their own hearts, Rom. x. 8. I desire no miraculous voice from heaven, no extraordinary signs, or unscriptural notices and informations in this matter: Lord, let me but find my heart complying with thy calls, my will obediently submitting to thy commands; sin my burden, and Christ my desire: I never crave a fairer or surer evidence of thy electing love to my soul: and if I had an oracle from heaven, an extraordinary messenger from the other world, to tell me thou lovest me, I have no reason to credit such a voice, whilst I find my heart wholly sensual, averse to God, and indisposed to all that is spiritual.

7. What reason have you why you should not presently embrace the call of God, and thankfully lay hold only on the first opportunity and season of salvation? Have you any greater matters in hand than the salvation of your precious souls? Is there any thing in this world that more concerns you? If the affairs of this life be so indispensably necessary, and those of the world to come so indifferent; if you think that meat and drink, trade and business, wife,

and children are such great things, and Christ, the soul, and eternity, such little things; or if you think salvation to be a work of the greatest necessity, and yet may safely enough be put off to an uncertain time, I may assure you, you will not be long of this mind. How soon are all the mistakes of men in these matters rectified in a few moments after death! Rectified, I say, but not remedied; your opinion will be changed, but not your condition.

8. Do you not every day easily and readily obey the calls of Satan and your own lusts, whilst God and conscience are suffered to call and strive with you in vain? If Satan or your lusts call you to the tavern, to the world, and sinful pleasures, you speedily comply with their call, and yield a ready obedience; if pride or covetousness call, or passion and revenge call, they need not call twice; and shall God and conscience call only in vain? Lord, what a creature is man become! If a vain companion call, you have no power to deny him; if God call, you have no ear to hear him.

9. You cannot but observe the obedience and diligence of many others, how seriously, painfully, and assiduously they ply, and follow on the work of their own salvation, and yet are no more concerned in the events and consequences of these things than you are. Doth it not trouble you when you compare yourselves with them? Do not such thoughts as these sometimes arise in your hearts upon such observations? ‘Lord, what a difference is there like to be betwixt their end and mine, when there is so apparent a difference in our course and conversation? Doth not God distinguish persons in this world by the frames of their hearts, and tenor of their lives, in order to the great distinction he will make betwixt one and another in the day of judgment? Have not I as precious a soul to save or lose as any of them? What is the matter that I sit with folded arms, whilst they are working out their salvation with fear and trembling? Why should any man or woman in the world be more careful for their souls than I for mine? Surely its capacity and excellency is equal with theirs, though my care and diligence be so unequal.’

10. To conclude, God will shortly give you an irresistible call to the grave, and after that his voice shall call to you in your graves, *Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment*: But wo be to you, wo and alas that ever you were born, if you should hear the call of God to die, before you have heard and obeyed his call to Christ! Will your death-bed be easy to you? Can you with any hope or comfort shoot the gulph of eternity before you have done one act for the security of your own souls from the wrath to come? It is a dreadful thing for a poor christless soul to sit quivering upon the

lips of a dying sinner, not able to stay, nor yet endure a parting pull from the body, in such a case as it is.

In a word ; If that God had made, and will shortly judge you ; if the Redeemer that shed his invaluable blood, and now offers you the purchases and benefits of it ; if you have any love to, or care of your own souls, which are more worth than the whole world ; if you have any value for heaven, or dread of hell, then, for God's sake, for Christ's sake, for your precious soul's sake, trifle with heaven and hell no longer, but be in earnest to *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*. Could I think of any other means or motives to secure your souls from danger, I would surely use them : could I reach your hearts effectually, I would deeply impress this great concern upon them : But I can neither do God's part of the work, nor yours ; it is some ease to me, I have in sincerity, (though with much imperfection and feebleness) done part of my own : The Lord prosper it by the blessing of his Spirit in the hearts of them that read it. *Amen.*