

else? What is it you desire in the world? his favour, or outward things? What is your care to get and keep most? What are those things about which you find joy and grief most exercised? These are the signs of love; if the enjoyment of God's favour be the greatest joy and contentment of your souls, and if the offending of God, and grieving of his Spirit, and the loss of the light of his countenance for that, be the greatest grief of your heart, then you love God as the chiefest good.

[2.] Do you seek his glory as the utmost end? God would have us in all things we do, to aim at his glory: 1 Cor. x. 31, 'Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God.' We are set apart for this end and purpose; and therefore, is your living, a living to God?

[3.] Do you obey God as the highest lord and law-giver? Obedience is necessary; God will be glorified in his sovereignty, and that is a great evidence of your interest in him.

[4.] Do you depend upon him as your paymaster and benefactor? When you do all things as looking for your reward from God, it is a great evidence: Rom. ii. 29, 'He is a Jew which is one inwardly, whose praise is not of men, but of God.' Is your heart taken up with the praise of God, the approbation of God, and the rewards of God?

But if all this will not help you to judge your hearts, there are but two things will give you comfort, and that is your own choice, and your own resignation. Your choice—Do you choose God for your portion? though you cannot say, God hath chosen you, and that he is yours, yet will you choose him? Are you resolved you will not be satisfied without him? Will you not be put off with anything besides God? And then, do you resign up yourselves to him? Do you say, Lord! I will be thine, I will not be mine own? As that nation that came to the Romans, and they refused to help them, they came with this plea, If you will not look upon us as your allies, look upon us as your vassals and subjects, as we resolve to be; so do you by an importunate faith thus fasten yourselves upon God, and say, Lord! if thou wilt not honour me, love me, bless me as thine; I am resolved to be thine, and if I perish, one must perish that desires to be thine. When you thus force yourselves as it were upon the Lord, that is all that is left for the relief of your souls, and to evidence your happy state.

SERMON LI.

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only-begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure—HEB. xi. 17-19.

THIS chapter is the chronicle of faith, or a record of the heroical acts which that grace had produced in all ages; or, if you will, the history of the most eminent believers, that ever have been in the world. When

he had spoken of the patriarchs in common, he cometh to speak of them in particular, and beginneth with Abraham, who in this glorious constellation shineth forth as a star of the first magnitude, and therefore is fitly styled the father of the faithful. And among all the acts of Abraham's faith nothing was more eminent than the offering of his son Isaac, that I have chosen to propound to your imitation; and the rather because Abraham was tried, not only for a proof of his own sincerity, but for a rare example to all iuture generations.

In these verses you have three circumstances.

1. An occasion for the exercise of Abraham's faith—*When he was tried.*

2. The greatness of the trial—*He offered up Isaac, and he that had received the promises offered up his only-begotten son; of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called.*

3. The work of faith, or his behaviour under this trial—*Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.*

[1.] The occasion — 'When he was tried.' *πειραζόμενος* — when he was tempted, and that by God: Gen. xxii. 1, 'God did tempt Abraham,' &c. But now God tempts no man: James i. 13, 'Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man;' that is, by inward suggestion and solicitation, but only by presenting the outward occasion, or by some extraordinary command. By presenting an outward occasion: Exod. xvi. 2, 'I will rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out, and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law or no.' Or else, by an extraordinary command, as God here tried Abraham, or as Christ tried the young man: Mat. xix. 21, 'Go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor.' There is no injustice in these extraordinary commands; the lawgiver may make what exception to his own laws he pleaseth. We are bound to the law, but the lawgiver himself is not bound. But why should God try Abraham? Austin saith, *Non ut ipse hominem inveniat, sed ut homo se inveniat*—Not that he might know Abraham, but that Abraham might know himself. God knows already what we are; but he tries us that we may be manifest to ourselves, and to others for their example. It is true, he saith, Gen. xxii. 12, 'Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thy only son from me.' But that is *humanitus dictum*; God speaketh as a man that knoweth not till after trial, as if he should say, Now there is a sufficient proof of thy sincerity, I have caused it to be known, and will accept of it as a good and sufficient proof.

[2.] The greatness of the trial, or the occasion amplified from the person offering, the person offered, and the work itself; and in all these respects it will appear that the trial was very great.

(1.) The person offering, Abraham, who is looked upon here as a father, and as one that had received the promises—*ὁ τὰς ἐπαγγελίας ἀναδεξάμενος*—which noteth not only the revelation of the promises concerning a numerous issue, and the Messial to come of his loins, but his entertaining of them, and cordial assent to them; he received them not only as a private believer, but as a trustee in trust for the use

of the church. In the first ages of the world, God had some eminent persons who received a revelation of God's will in the name of all the rest. This was Abraham's case; he is here considered as a father, a loving father, and as one that hath received the promises as a public person, and father of the faithful—the person whom God had chosen in whom to deposit the promises.

(2.) The person offered—Isaac, not bullocks, or goats, or rams, or lambs, but Isaac—a son, and a son whom he loved: Gen. xxii. 2, 'Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains, which I shall tell thee of.' He was the son of Sarah, his legitimate wife, the heir of the lawful bed. Ishmael was cast out of doors, and Isaac's posterity was only to be reckoned to Abraham, as the blessed seed, among whom God would have his church. He was given to Abraham, after he had long gone childless, and when Sarah's womb was dead, and therefore he had never hopes of more children. But all this was nothing to what follows—'Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called:' a child upon whom the accomplishment of the promises depended. Nature and grace concurred to incline Abraham's heart to favour Isaac. Nature; for love is descending, and the children of age are most loved: Abraham's age, when almost expired, was wonderfully renewed in the birth of Isaac, and an only son in whom he might hope to survive. Grace concurred also, the promises pitched on him: there was no possibility in nature, or promise above nature, that he should have any more children by Sarah; and Isaac himself was without children, and there was a plain affirmation, that the people which should be accounted his seed should spring from Isaac; not only natural affection, but faith was against it—to kill Isaac was to cut off all his hopes. There is sometimes a quarrel between lust and lust, but here between grace and grace, between faith and obedience; Isaac being lost, all hopes of the promise seemed to be lost, which was confirmed to him by God's own mouth—the same mouth that gave him the promise, gave him the command to slay the son of the promise. Abraham was now to put all the promises to slaughter; to cut off Isaac was in effect to cut off all hope of eternal life by Christ, who was to descend of him. Christ was included in Isaac, and in Christ all the hopes of the church. If the conflict had only been with natural affection, it had been no such great matter; but the command and promise seemed to clash; if he had disobeyed the command, he had not been faithful Abraham; and if he had disbelieved the promise, still he had not been faithful Abraham.

[3.] The act itself. All this was to be done by his own hand—an aged father to kill his own son! the father of the faithful to sacrifice the son of the promise! A jewel lately given was now demanded again. If God had told Abraham that his son must die, it had been grievous, but that he must offer him, here was the trial.

3. Let us now look upon Abraham's behaviour under this great trial. Here is no disputing; he never questioned the oracle; it is God's will, and I must obey; he will provide for his promise well enough. 'In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen,' Gen. xxii. 14. Here is no delay, Gen. xxii. 3, 'And Abraham rose early in the morning, and

saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.' Here is no shifting, though he carried the matter closely, concealing it from Isaac, and his servants. 'By faith he offered Isaac;' faith is the root and principle of the action. 'He offered,' but Abraham did not offer him; God interposed and prevented him. Yet God counts it done: James ii. 21, 'Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?' And God said, Gen. xxii. 12, 'Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me.' Partly because of his purpose, and partly because it was not a naked purpose; all things were ready, if God had not interposed—his son bound, and laid upon the altar.

Doct. 1. It is the property of faith to carry us through the greatest trials, with a ready, and cheeriul, and acceptable obedience, and submission to the will of God.

To draw forth the marrow of the text, I shall branch this doctrine into some lesser propositions.

First I observe,—Ere we come to heaven, we all have our trials. It is the common lot of the saints to be tried. God's trials, which he suffereth to befall us, are in scripture compared unto two things—to the winnowing of wheat, and to the refining of gold. To the winnowing of wheat: Luke xxii. 31, 'And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.' The devil may shake and toss us as the wheat is tossed from sieve to sieve, but all to purge away our chaff. Then it is compared to the refining of gold: 1 Peter i. 7, 'That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, when it is tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.' Gold is melted, and loseth nothing of its substance but its dross; so it is for our improving and bettering, that God permits us to be tossed and shaken by Satan and bitter afflictions. There is need of trials, or else God would not make use of this dispensation: 1 Peter i. 6, 'Though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.' All of us take our turn and share. God trieth some of his people to discover their weakness to themselves, and he trieth others to manifest the grace that is in them.

1. God will have the weakness of his own servants tried, that they may not conceit they have more grace than they have: and that the evil which before lay hid, may be discovered and cured. Thus God tried Hezekiah: 2 Chron. xxxii. 31, 'God left him to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart.' And Christ tried Philip: John vi. 6, 'This he said to prove him, for he himself knew what he would do.'

2. He will have their grace tried; and that for our comfort and for his own glory.

[1.] For our comfort. We have not ordinarily so clear a proof of the reality of grace, as under sore trials: Rom. v. 4, 'Tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience,' *δοκιμήν*, trial, and *δοκιμήν*, experience, or trial, hope: then is any grace most seen. By knocking upon the vessel we see whether it be full or empty, cracked or sound,

so by these knocks of providence we are discovered. Stars that lie hid in the day shine in the night. The rose is not so sweet on the tree as in the still. A sore tempest discovereth the goodness of the ship and the skill of the pilot, so in the night of afflictions the splendour of grace is best seen. When we are set over the fire, our fragraney is discovered, and a christian's skill in a tempest is obedience.

[2.] It is for God's glory, that our ready self-denial and submission, and dependence on his wisdom, should be known, as the centurion said of his servants: Mat. viii. 9, 'I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh, and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.' There was an exact discipline in the Roman camps; so the Lord is honoured when his servants are tried, and they discover what a spirit of God and glory resteth upon them: 1 Peter iv. 14, 'If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye, for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.' God will have the world know that he hath a people who are at his beck, as he is said, Isa. xli. 2, 'To raise up the righteous man from the east, and call him to his foot.' Abraham went to and fro at God's command, as God did appoint him. The Lord hath a people that love him better than their lives, than their choicest comforts, and will endure any misery rather than deny any part of their duty. At the last day, by trial our faith will be found to praise and honour: 1 Peter i. 7, 'That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ;' then it will be found to be such a faith as Christ will accept and reward. Now these trials are manifold: 1 Peter i. 6, 'Ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations;' and diverse: James i. 2, 'Count it all joy when ye fall into diverse temptations;' because diverse things are to be tried. As,—

(1.) Our sincerity. We have but notions about the comforts of christianity till we are cast into great afflictions. The word of God cometh to us in word only, but then we prove our belief and sense of it. A gilded potsherd may shine till it cometh to scouring, then the varnish is worn off. When all things are prosperous, and our interest leads us to the profession of religion, the truth of grace is not so much discovered, but in deep troubles it is seen: 2 Cor. vi. 4, 'But in all things approving ourselves the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses.' When God searcheth men, and trieth men to the purpose, hirelings become changelings. The stony ground seemed fruitful till the sun did arise with a burning heat, Mat. xiii. 20, 21, and then it withered away, and all that comfort and joy which they formerly had by the word is lost. The blade on the stony ground made as fair a show for awhile as any of the rest, but it had no rooting.

(2) Faith is tried: 1 Peter i. 7, 'That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.' So Abraham was here tried; so the woman of Canaan was tried, Mat. xv. 25-28. While all things are quiet and comfortable, we live by sense rather than by faith. As the worth of

a soldier is not known in times of peace, and when he is out of action. *Ad fortiter faciendum opus est aliquâ rerum difficultate*; when we are put to some difficulty and strait, then is faith seen; but we do not brave it, and word it at other times.

(3.) Our patience, humility, and submission to God are tried. When his mighty hand is upon us, then it is seen whether we are content to be what God would have us to be. The devil accused Job for an hypocrite, and would fain have him put upon this kind of trial: Job i. 9-11, 'Doth Job serve God for nought? Hast thou not made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.' It is no wonder to see us without murmuring, when our houses are filled with good things; or cheerful, while we have increase and plenty—what have we to complain of? But then is the trial, if we can suppress murmuring and discontents when God's hand is against us.

(4.) Our ready obedience in the most difficult points of duty. So Abraham was tried here; and so Moses was tried when God sent him to Pharaoh, Exod. iii. 10.

(5.) Our contempt of earthly things. This is never so much seen as in a patient submission to the loss of them: Heb. x. 24, 'They took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing in themselves that they have in heaven a better, and a more enduring substance.' When a man can take losses not only patiently, but joyfully, as reckoning upon a happiness elsewhere, it is a notable proof how little we set by outward things. God's children know not how to judge of their mortification when they abound in plenty, and all things flow in upon them according to their heart's desire.

(6.) Our dependence and trust in God: Hab. iii. 18. 'Yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation;' Ps. cxii. 7, 'He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.'

Use. Seeing we must have our trials, let us look for them, and prepare for them; and when they come, see that we discover nothing but what will become obedience and submission to God.

1. Let us look for them, partly that we may not be perplexed at God's dispensation when it cometh: 1 Peter iv. 12, 'Beloved! think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you'—*μὴ ξενίζεσθε*. We are amazed and perplexed, as men that meet with some new and strange thing, when God cometh to try us in our sweetest earthly comforts, and to blast that which is dearest to us—as credit, liberty, life. We should make these things familiar to us before they come. But, alas! we are secure when trials are nearest us, as the disciples were astonished when God was about to smite the shepherd and scatter the sheep, Mat. xxvi. 31. We are ready to dream of much worldly ease and comfort: Acts i. 6, 'Lord! wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?' We get a little breathing time from trouble, and promise ourselves perpetual exemption: Ps. xxx. 6, 'In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved;' so loth are we to forecast for trials, or to put ourselves

out of our fool's paradise. We promise ourselves too much when we dream of nothing but pleasure and contentment, as if we would go to heaven without exercise, without warrings within and fightings without. God hath but one Son without sin, but he has none without a cross. We must all be tried before we get to heaven. Partly, that we may try how we can bear them in imagination. It is good to suppose the worst; it hurts not. See the suppositions of faith, Ps. xxiii. 4, 'Yea, though I walk through the valley and shadow of death, I will fear no evil.' He compares himself to a sheep. Suppose I should be like a poor sheep wandering in the night when beasts of prey come out, ready to be devoured every moment. Presumption is a coward, and a runaway; it cannot endure to think of evil, or to look the enemy in the face; but faith meets it in the open field, provides for it when evil is not present; it makes suppositions: Hab. iii. 17, 'Suppose the fig-tree should not blossom,' &c. Suffer fear to prophesy, that faith may be the better prepared. Suppose the Lord should turn the tables, and bring on such a sad condition—nothing to help me, no friends to stand by me, all my children and near relations taken from me, all the supports and comforts of the present life should fail me,—what then? Thus faith supposeth evils that are feared, and then they are more comfortable. Before we take up a burden we poise it, and are wont to make an essay of our strength, that we may fit our back and shoulders to it; so it is good to poise our burdens before God lays them upon our backs. What if God put me upon such a trial? And as we should look for it; so—

2. Prepare for it: let us get soundness of grace, and strength of grace.

[1.] Get soundness of grace into your hearts. A hireling, when he comes to trial, will be changeable: guile of spirit will never hold out. Many have made a fair profession, but when put to trial, they have fallen foully. God loves to unmask hypocrites, to take off their disguise: Prov. xxvi. 26, 'The wicked shall be showed before the congregation;' and therefore it is good to prepare for them, to get soundness of grace, that you may be able to bear them. They that have no root cannot endure scorching weather. When the tree is soundly shaken, rotten apples fall to the ground; so in great trials guile of spirit will fail. And then—

[2.] Get strength of grace. Why? we cannot set bounds to trouble; we know not what God may do, and we must prepare for the worst. A little grace and a strong temptation will not do well together; therefore take heed, be not overlaid, and overcome. We are to look after not only truth, but growth of grace; to grow more holy, heavenly, humble; but above all, to increase in faith every day—'I have prayed that your faith fail not,' Luke xxii. 52. Chaff is lost in tossing from side to side, but full-eared corn remains behind. This is our Saviour's direction to the apostles: Mat. xxvi. 41, 'Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.' They had not received as yet the promise of the Spirit; they were weak, they had not such soundness of grace as was fit for trial; therefore 'watch and pray,' that is, look for trial and pray for grace, for the full measures of the Spirit, that you may not be overcome. As, you know, the steward, Luke xvi. 3, was preparing—What if I should be turned out of my stewardship? how shall I live

then? So it is good to see how you shall live in a dear year when creatures fail, when the Lord turns the tables, when the course of his providence alters. Have I a God to trust to? have I grace to bear me out?

3. When you are upon your trial, see that you discover nothing but what will become obedience and submission to God—no impatience, no murmuring, no worldliness, no distrust of God. God taketh much notice of your behaviour then, and your sincerity is put to the test. What doth the trial bring forth? Hab. ii. 21, ‘Behold his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith.’ If it bring forth pride, swelling against God’s sovereignty, censures of his providence, distrust of his fatherly love, it is a sad case; but if it produce a lively exercise of faith, oh what a confirmation will this be to you! So that it is of great importance to your peace to see how you carry yourselves. When the vessel is pierced, it discovereth the liquor that is within, whether it be thick, or dreggy, or musty. Now God cometh to pierce us, to give vent to that which is within us.

Doct. 2. Observe,—the greater the faith, the greater the trial.

Abraham is put to offer his only son. Look as Jacob drove, as the little ones were able to endure, Gen. xxxiii. 14; such is the conduct of providence: God proportions our trials as he hath given in strength of grace: 2 Cor. x. 13, ‘There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man; for God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able.’ God doth not love to put an angel’s work upon a man, nor a man’s work upon children, nor the work of strong faith upon a weak believer; but still, according to our particular strength, he proportions our work. We count him a cruel man that overdrives or overlades his beast; and will the gracious and wise God seek to crush you? His trials are not that he may destroy, but that he may prove. But then, on the other side, strong faith must look for strong trials; and after God hath richly furnished us with comfort and the graces of the Spirit, God will put us upon expense. When he hath laid in much there will be a time of laying out. Satan’s rage is against the best: Heb. x. 32, ‘After ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions.’ When the castle is victualled, then he suffers the devil to lay siege; when God hath provided us with a stock of grace and of the comforts of the Holy Spirit, he calls us to a time of trial. As Paul, after his rapture, had his buffetings: 2 Cor. xii. 7, ‘Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.’ It is notable, in the story of Christ’s own life, when he received a voice from heaven, Mat. iii. 17, ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ Then he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil, Mat. iv. 1; and Luke iv. 1, ‘Jesus, being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.’ So when we have the highest assurances of God’s love, and are feasted with the comforts of his Spirit, we must look for trials and exercise.

Use. Let not the weakest despond and be discouraged, and let not the best be secure. Let not the weakest despond: there is a propor-

tion between your graces and afflictions ; when God hath fitted you, he will call you out to battle, and not before. Let not the best be secure ; Satan's rage is most against you, Satan labours mightily to regain his hold—' He hath desired to sift thee as wheat,' Luke xxii. 31. He is very jealous of his kingdom, and he loves to foil God's champions. He had a special spite against Job, and therefore he moved the Lord against him. *Hos querit dejicere quos videt stare*, saith Cyprian. The devil doth not look after those that are tottering and falling of their own accord ; but when he sees God's champions, for his cause, honour, and truth, his spite is against them.

SERMON LII.

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac : and he that had received the promises, offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called : accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead ; from whence also he received him in a figure.—HEB. xi. 17–19.

Obs. God hath a hand in all our trials. ' It came to pass, after those things, God tempted Abraham,' Gen. xxii. 1. He tempts no man by way of solicitation to sin, but for trial of our integrity and obedience. How doth God tempt ? He doth not tempt now by extraordinary command as before in the time of the old testament. When the people of God were confined within a narrow corner of the world, then God tried them by extraordinary command ; then they were not called to martyrdom, nor to suffer exquisite torment for the name of God, to put faith and patience to trial ; then they were not scattered among wolves, as they now are.

In the new testament we are often put to the trial, whether we will love our lives unto the death.

But what hand hath God in temptation now ?

1. Sometimes he withdraws his grace that he may try us : 2 Chron. xxxii. 31, ' God left Hezekiah to try him, and that he might know all that was in his heart.' God tries some to discover their graces, and he tries some by withdrawing grace, that he may discover their own personal weakness, without his concurrence, as well as the strength of his own grace. When we grow proud and secure, God takes away the staff and stay, and then the poor creature falls to the ground ; or, as the nurse withdraws her hand and lets the child take a knock, so God leaves us that he may prove and try us, and show what is in our heart.

2. Sometimes he permits us to be tempted by Satan or evil men. By Satan ; thus we pray, ' Lead us not into temptation ;' that is, give us not up to the devil's tempting. And Christ tells Peter, Luke xxii. 32, ' I have prayed that thy faith fail not.' He doth not say, I have prayed that temptation come not, but that thy faith fail not. When

the Lord suffers Satan to toss and winnow his children, it is but to try them, that so their graces may be discovered, and they may be acquainted with themselves. Sometimes by evil men ; so Deut. xiii. 3, 'The Lord your God proveth you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul.' When doth the Lord prove them?—when a dreamer of dreams, when lying and seducing spirits are gone abroad, that is a time when God tries his people. He suffers those winds to blow, that so solid grain may be distinguished from the chaff. We are then tried what we are, when seducing spirits go abroad, and plausible errors are broached and vented in the world.

3. Sometimes doth the Lord try us by the course of his providence ; and there both by afflictions and mercies. By afflictions : Deut. viii. 2, 'And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thy heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments or no.' This was the end of that tedious and long walk in the wilderness. Why did the Lord keep them forty years in a howling wilderness, walking about, forward and backward, when they might have reached Canaan in forty days?—to humble, and prove, and try them. So the Lord suffers affliction to seize upon you ; he takes away your nearest and dearest comforts, and relations, to see what you will discover ; whether murmuring or supplication, rebellion or trust. Afflictions breach the vessel, and according to the liquor that is in it so it runs ; yet the breaching of the vessel doth not cause it to run musty, or dreggy ; that is from within. By affliction, God discovers whether grace or corruption will be discovered. And sometimes by the violence of evil men, he suffers rough winds to discover the solid grain from the chaff : Luke ii. 37, 'A sword shall pass through thy own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.' It is spoken of the Virgin Mary, when she saw Christ upon the cross, it was as if a sword passed through her heart. And as the Lord tries his people by affliction, so by the blessings of his providence, God gives a full condition to try you. Our trial doth not lie in miseries only, but in abundance ; to see whether we will love him when he gives us abundance of all things ; whether we will forget him, or cleave close to him, and own him the more. As you try a servant by leaving loose money about the house ; so God tries his people by the comforts of this world, therefore doth the Lord give Israel dainties ; that is, a great proportion, a certain rate every day, that he might prove them whether they will suffer their hearts to be carried out after the world, or whether they will love him : Exod. xvi. 4, 'Behold I will rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out, and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law or no.'

4. God hath a great hand in correcting, limiting, and ordering the temptation. God sets bounds to the tempter, and orders the kind of the temptation. When Satan moved the Lord against Job, God gives him leave—Go, touch his substance, but not his person by any means. And when his commission is enlarged to inflict botches upon his skin, yet take heed of his life. Thus far shall the trial go, and no farther, even as the Lord will. When we are in Satan's hands, Satan is in God's hand. It was said of the conspiracy against Julius Cæsar, all

that was noble in it belonged to Brutus, but all the malice and cruelty in the design was imputed to Cassius ; so all that is good and tends to good, that is from the Lord, as the moderation and sanctification of temptation, the gracious use his people make of it ; all this is from God, but the evil and malignity comes from the devil. It is said in Mat. 4. 1, ' The Spirit led him into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.' The devil had not only a hand in Christ's temptations, but the Spirit.

Use. Well then, acknowledge God in all your afflictions ; he hath a great hand in them. We suffer a spaniel to hunt a duck, not to devour or destroy it ; so the Lord suffers the devil to toss us and try us, but he hath a hand over him that he shall not devour and tear us in pieces ; therefore acknowledge God in all. Christ hath directed our address to him—' Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil ;' wherein we desire, first that God would keep the temptation off, if he see fit ; for who would desire poison to try the strength of an antidote ? Therefore we first desire that the Lord would keep off the trial ; if not, then we beg of him that he would moderate temptation, that he would give us strength, that we may not be foiled by it. We have deserved to be led into temptation, and left there to be foiled and overwhelmed ; and therefore we deprecate this judgment.

Obs. We are never tried to purpose till we are tried in our Isaac.

This was Abraham's trial—' Offer now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest,' Gen. xxii. 2 ; so we are tried in our Isaac. What is that ? in things that are nearest and dearest to us. It was an easy matter that Solomon offered so many thousand beasts—' Twenty thousand oxen, and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep,' 1 Kings viii. 62 ; but here was a greater offering. But when are we put to such a trial, to offer up our Isaac ?

Ans. In three cases—In case of submission ; in case of self-denial ; in case of mortification.

1. In the case of submission to the strokes of providence, when near relations are taken away from us—a husband, a wife, a beloved and an only child. God knows how to strike us in the right vein ; there will be the greatest trial where our love is set, when God deprives us of those things which we most affect. As, suppose the providence of God is not past, and God is ready to take them from you, and you are afraid ; here your trial is in a willing resignation ; give up your Isaac to the will of the Lord, as Abraham did when God called him. There cannot be such a concurrence of so many endearing circumstances in any relation of yours as there was in Abraham's Isaac, a son of his love, a son of his old age, a son that was conceived by virtue of the promise, a son in whom the promise was pitched. To take away Isaac was to take away Christ and eternal life, that was included in Isaac ; for Christ was to come of Isaac. I will but use this argument to press you to resign up your comforts into the hands of God. When you are willing and ready to part with your comforts at God's call, it is the only way to keep them. Abraham offered his Isaac, and was no loser by it ; he kept him. This is the way, and the only way to preserve them, to resign them to the will of the Lord. But if the providence be already past, the stroke of God hath lighted upon your relations and your family, and your comforts are taken from you, then your trial is in a

patient submission, as before in a willing resignation : if you submit to the will of God, this is to offer up your Isaac. And here you have an advantage of Abraham too. Your relations do not fall under the weight of your arm, and by your own hands, as Isaac was to be offered by his own father ; for Abraham knew nothing to the contrary, but that he was to be his executioner, and yet he submitted. In all such cases remember it is a trial, and men upon trial are wont to do their best. When God comes to pierce and broach you, will you discover nothing but murmuring, worldly sorrow, vile affections, impatience, unsubmission to the will of God ? When God had tried Abraham, he said, Gen. xxii. 12, ' Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thy only son, from me.' What ! shall the Lord say I tried Abraham and found him faithful ; but now I know your stubbornness, disobedience, taxing my providence, quarrelling at my justice ? God comes to make a sensible proof of us.

2. In case of self-denial, forsaking our choicest interests for a good conscience. To this purpose doth the apostle bring this instance, to persuade them to martyrdom, to take the spoiling of their goods cheerfully, without murmuring and repining. Can anything be nearer and dearer to us than Isaac was to Abraham ? Life and all must go if God call for it. If anything be nearer and dearer to us than other, God must have it : Luke xiv. 26, ' If any man come to me, and hate not father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life,' &c. Either you must hate God, or hate the creature ; there is no medium. Whatever we are unwilling to quit for God's sake, we love it more than God and Christ. There he numbers up all relations—father, mother, brother, sister, wife, children. Why ? because at all times christians are not called to lay down their lives ; but we must venture the displeasure of near relations, father, mother, &c., upon conscience of our duty to God, and when reasons of religion call us thereto. God came now to prove whom Abraham loved most, whether he loved his God or his Isaac best. Abraham loved Isaac well, but God better. So many times God puts us to a sensible trial,—which we love best, whether our worldly interests or the Lord himself. When a servant followeth two men that walk together, you cannot tell to whom he belongeth ; but when they part, then you see whose servant he is. God stands on the one side, interest on the other ; either you must turn to your interests, or turn to God. The Lord may put us to such a trial, as usually he doth his children one time or other. Now consider in such cases Abraham's self-denial. Here was the slaying of an innocent person, and this his son—son on whom the promises were pitched, for they were to be fulfilled in him. The more difficult any piece of obedience is, the more excellent ; and the more self-denial, the more difficult ; and the more we are to deny reason itself, as well as our natural affection, the more self-denial. All these circumstances concurred here : Abraham was to overcome his natural affection. What was dearer to him than Isaac ? And therefore we must not only part with mean things, but such as we prize above anything in the world. When God requireth we should forsake father, and mother, and all our dearest relations, we must not grudge at it. Nay, our lives should not be dear to us : Acts xx. 24, ' Neither count I my life dear

unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy,' &c. Nay, Abraham was to deny his reason: he might doubt whether the revelation were from God, or a delusion of Satan, or whether he were absolutely obliged; no, but he simply resigneth up himself to God's wisdom and will. We are apt to distinguish and wriggle ourselves out of a sense of our duty; but here was no such matter, no disputing, no debating, but a ready compliance. Nay, consider the Lord's love to us in Christ; for in all this Abraham was a lively type of God's love to us in Christ, who gave his Isaac for us, his only-begotten and dearly-beloved Son, better than all the world, who was made a burnt-offering for us, and was slain indeed. We can never deny ourselves so far as to answer what God hath done for us.

3. Because this is not every day's trial, this sensible self-denial; therefore we are tried in our Isaac in mortification, in renouncing our bosom lust. This is a daily trial, and this is a sure trial, for lusts stick closer to us than interests. It is easier to part with rams and rivers of oil than to part with one sin; they are as a joint and member of the body, therefore called members, Col. iii. 5; and the 'right hand,' and the 'right eye,' Mat. v. 29, 30. Now in mortifying those corruptions which are so contrary to the spiritual life, and yet so rooted in our nature, here we are tried, whether we will give up our Isaac. Some corruptions stick closer to us than others, and in renouncing those, the sincerity of our love is tried: Ps. xviii. 23, 'I was upright before him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity.' What lust did you ever leave for God? Can you ever remember the plucking out the right eye and the cutting off the right hand? or the withstanding your natural inclinations? or the renouncing your lusts and corruptions for the Lord's sake? Can you remember his love prevailed with you to part with that which was so near and dear to the soul, that was so close as a joint to the body?

Use. Do not measure your uprightness by a lower trial, that doth but demolish the outworks of sin, and weaken some petty interest. It is no warrant to a captain to give up the town, as soon as the great guns come, or when the enemy hath taken the outworks. If you give up at the first assault, it is a very bad sign. As Julian the Apostate once said, If you cannot endure our scoffs, how will you endure the darts of the Persians? Jer. xii. 5, 'If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses?' So if you cannot endure a frown, a little hazard of your interest, a little brow-beating from those that are in power and place, how will you be able 'to resist to blood'? Heb. xii. 4. So to quit a lesser sin, and it may be a sin that will bring inconvenience upon you, that is no trial; it is no trial to submit to a lesser stroke of providence—it may be you were not affected with it—but to part with your Isaac, there is the trial; when God takes away your nearest comforts and relations, then to keep your hearts upright, this is a trial to purpose.

2. Again, it shames us that we stick at a trifle; a little ease and sloth, and every slight temptation, causeth us to make bold with God, or to neglect the worship of God, or disobey the command of God; and every lesser excuse is enough to cause you to omit duty. When you stick at anything in the ways of the Lord, because it is irksome to flesh

and blood, and seems tedious, will you reason with yourselves—How can I look for Abraham's blessing when I am so far from Abraham's temper? he was willing to offer up Isaac. If you had Abraham's trial, if you were to conflict with natural affections and reason, if you were to reconcile the command and promise, what should you do? But a small thing, a little difficulty and inconvenience, is enough to turn us out of the way, and discourages us.

Obs. Faith maketh us go through such trials with honour to God, and acceptation with him.

Here I shall show the influence of faith, what power and operation it hath upon the heart to carry on the soul in such trials.

1. Faith teacheth us how to value and esteem invisible and spiritual things: it judgeth of all things aright. Faith is a spiritual prudence; it is opposed not only to ignorance, but also to folly. So much unbelief as we have, so much folly we have; and so much faith as we have, so much the wiser are we in spiritual things—'O fools, and slow of heart to believe!' Luke xxiv. 25. But now faith is a spiritual wisdom; it teacheth us how to value the favour of God and the comforts of the other world, and the smiles of his countenance; it shows us that all outward things are nothing in comparison of inward comfort. Reason will teach us how to value the interests and concernments of the present life, and the worth of riches and honour; and sense will teach us the worth of pleasures; but now it is faith that teacheth us how to value the favour of God, even above life itself: Ps. lxxiii. 3, 'Thy loving-kindness is better than life.' Therefore because faith makes us wise in this kind, it makes us part with things never so near and dear to us, because they are base and vile in respect of the favour of God. It is faith makes us judge that the greatest suffering is better than the least sin, because the least sin makes us hazard the favour of God: Heb. xi. 26, 'Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.' The greatest suffering may occasion a greater sense of his favour, and that brings us nearer to God. The worst and most afflictive part of christianity with the lowest enjoyment of God is better than the highest enjoyment of all things that are in the world. Faith shows us that the wrath of man is nothing to the wrath of God: Heb. xi. 27, 'By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing him that is invisible.'

2. Faith solves all doubts and riddles, whenever we are in a puzzle; for Abraham was divided—What! shall I offer Isaac, and put the promises to slaughter, or must I disobey God on the other side? Now faith doth silence this riddle—'He accounted that God was able to raise him from the dead.' Faith by a resolute dependence saith, Let Isaac go, God will provide for the promise well enough. Faith believes the accomplishment of the promise, whatever reason and sense say to the contrary; and if the command of killing his son contradict the whole gospel of the promised seed, yet, because both comes from God, faith leaveth it to God to solve his own riddle; it cuts the knot asunder by a resolute dependence upon the power of God. I must kill Isaac, and yet God's power is sufficient to make good his promise. Faith reconciles the greatest contradictions, and so settles doubtful thoughts: Job xiii. 15, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him;' though he

make breach upon breach, yet faith can reconcile the hand of God, though most heavy, with the heart of God; it can reconcile death with life; nothing with all things; anger with favour. And so for the commands of God. Unsanctified reason is an unfit judge of divine commands; but with faith God's authority prevails, whatever our private reason may allege to the contrary. Men take their measures amiss when they make human reason the supreme judge of all things in religion; no, faith is an absolute submission to the authority of God: 2 Cor. x. 5, 'Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.' If anything appear to be a divine revelation, as the doctrine of the trinity, and the resurrection, human reason must not be heard against it; neither must we question the truth of any divine promise for the improbability and difficulty of the fulfilling of it.

3. Faith looketh for the restitution of our comforts again, in kind or in value, when they seem to be most lost. Faith knows it is a saving bargain to lose things for God's sake. The way to save is to lose; he can and will, beyond comparison, recompense whatever is lost for him: Mark x. 29, 30, 'Whoever forsakes father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, shall have an hundredfold,' &c.; that is, shall have his parents, relations, and comforts in kind; or else he shall have it abundantly made up to him. Carnal sense knows not what to make of these promises, and therefore Julian the Apostate scoffed at this promise, as if it were a very great absurdity, that Christ should say, He that loseth father, or mother, shall receive an hundredfold. What! Shall they have a hundred fathers and a hundred mothers?—No; but we shall have them in value. Abraham knew he should receive Isaac here one way or other, though he could not see which way—'He received him in a figure,' as is said in the next verse. The king of Israel, when the Lord bade him to dismiss the army that he had hired, was mightily troubled; saith he, 2 Chron. xxv. 9, 'What shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel? And the man of God answered, The Lord is able to give thee much more than this.' All trouble ariseth from this, when sense cannot tell how our comforts shall be made up. What recompense shall we have for those things we part with for God's sake? for when a thing appears not, we think it quite gone. Faith saith, God is able to give thee more than this. When a man is made a beggar for God's sake; when he is exposed to the frowns of the world, to poverty and contempt, for God's sake, sense says, How shall we live? how shall our family and children be provided for? God is able to give thee more; these things shall be supplied, the comforts we lose shall be made up again; for a man can be no loser by God.

4. Faith is a grace that looks to things, and then the harshest trials seem nothing. Sense looks to things present; then it is bitter, harsh, and troublesome to deny ourselves upon the justest reasons of religion; but faith looks to things to come, and then afflictions are light: 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18, 'For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding, and eternal weight of glory. While we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are not seen;

for the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal.' Give me a man that hath a sight of eternity, and then turn him loose to the frowns of the world—to the favours of the world, to temptations and trials, they are nothing, he goes through them merrily, because his heart is taken up with higher and better things. When he hath the perspective of faith, and looks into the other world, and hath had a ravishing affective sight of the glorious inheritance, he can easily part with the world when God calls for it. There is nothing great to him that knows the greatness of eternity; it is nothing to be judged of man's judgment, to be exposed to man's wrath; they are acquainted with eternity, and the things of another world. Faith looks within the veil, and so hath a mighty influence on the support of the soul in times of trial.

5. Faith worketh by love, and then nothing is too near and dear to him, so God may be glorified. Faith doth not only look forward, but backward; not only forward to things to come, but backward to things past. It reports to the soul the great things God hath done for us in Christ; he hath given us his Son, who is infinitely worth all that we can give to him. It apprehends the love of God in Christ, and thus argues, When God hath given me himself, and his Christ, his only son, to die for me, shall I stick at anything? If God give Christ, shall Abraham stick at Isaac? If the blessed seed to come, shall his only seed be spared? God hath told Abraham, Gen. xv. 1, 'I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward;' and Gen. xxii. 18, 'In thy seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.' And, therefore, will the Lord have my Isaac? I love him well, but I love my God better; Isaac shall be offered. The very comforts we part with, we had them from God, and he demandeth what he lent. Thus faith goes to work, urging the soul with the love of God, that we may out of thankfulness to God, part with those comforts which he requireth of us.

6. Faith committeth events to God, and so we are eased of many tossings of mind or unquiet agitations, that otherwise would obstruct us: Prov. xvi. 3, 'Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.' So Abraham here committed the event to God, not determining this or that, but was satisfied in God's all-sufficiency, ver. 19, 'Accounting that God was able to raise him up from the dead.' He was not certain that God would do it that way, but he was certain God was able to do it. This is the nature of faith, not to determine the event and to prescribe to God, but to refer it to him, and to wait for the promised deliverance, though we cannot imagine the manner how it shall be brought about.

Use. Well then, if we miscarry in trials, it is for want of faith; and if we would not miscarry, set faith a-work. We do not consult with faith, but with sense and carnal reason; and then no wonder we miscarry. If we did but set faith a-work to solve our doubts and riddles, and to see the restitution of our comforts, we should not easily be nonplussed. Let faith judge of spiritual things, and not reason. If we let reason judge of spiritual things, then the consolations of God will seem small. But let faith tell you how able God is; let it look forward and backward, and this will bring the soul through the temptation.

I observe one point more. It is said 'By faith Abraham offered.'

How did he offer? Abraham is said to have offered him, though he did not consummate and complete the obligation; in his heart he had parted with him, and given him wholly to God, and he began really to do what he had resolved upon. As to the consummation, there was no impediment on his part; but the Lord interposed and hindered the execution of his purpose, and therefore it is said, Abraham offered; and God tells him, 'Thou hast not spared thy son.' Isaac was rescued and spared; yet because it was his vow and his serious purpose so to do, and all things were ready, therefore God counted it as if he had offered up his son.

Hence observe, if faith be hindered in the accomplishment, the vow and purpose is accepted with God.

Many times we are put upon services that we cannot bring to a perfect issue; now the purpose God takes notice of. David was troubled that he should dwell in a house of cedar, and the ark of God dwell within curtains, and that God had not a house, therefore he purposes to build a house for God. Now, saith God, 1 Kings viii. 18, 'Since it was in thine heart to build a house for my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart;' and 2 Cor. viii. 12, 'If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.' When all things are ready on our part, and there wants but a providence for our effecting what we intended, God takes notice of the ready mind. Many intend to do such a thing, but God's providence permitteth it not. These obstacles which happen, without our fault, do not hinder the acceptance of our purpose. So God took notice of David's purpose: Ps. xxxii. 5, 'I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.' Though it were but a purpose, God gave in the comfort of a pardon. This may answer their doubts, who are wont to say, Abraham was called to this great trial, to show his love and obedience. When are we called thus? Christians, every one of us, one way or other, are called to trial. There are martyrs in vow and preparation of mind, though not in actual accomplishment, because not called to suffering. There must be a solemn purpose to give up all to Christ, when we come to Christ. All that are saved are martyrs, either actually or habitually; actually, if the honour of your profession and conscience of your duty to God require it; or else, habitually, in the purpose and preparation of your minds.

Use. I would apply it thus—If God takes purposes for performances, and accounts things done when really purposed, let us take God's promises for performances; if God saith, it shall be done, account it as if it were done—'Babylon is fallen, is fallen,' Rev. xiv. 8.