

SERMON UPON 1 THESSALONIANS V. 17.

Pray without ceasing.—1 THESS. V. 17.

IN the words we have—(1.) A duty, pray ; (2.) The continuance of the duty, always, *ἀδιαλείπτως* ; from both observe—

Doct. That constant and frequent prayer to God is a duty required of christians.

In handling this doctrine I shall show—

(1.) What prayer is ; (2.) How it is to be carried on without ceasing ; (3.) The reasons of the doctrine.

I. What prayer is ; and here I shall speak—(1.) Of the nature of prayer ; (2.) Of the several kinds of it.

First, For the nature of prayer. ‘Prayer is the offering up of our desires to God, in the name of Christ, for such things as are agreeable to his will.’

1. It is an offering up of our desires. Desires are the soul and life of prayer, words are but the body. Now as the body without the soul is dead, so are prayers unless they are animated with our desires: Ps. x. 17, ‘Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble.’ God heareth not words, but desires.

2. These desires are offered unto God, or brought before the Lord in this solemn way: Zeph. iii. 10, ‘My suppliants, even the daughters of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering;’ that is, shall reverently express their desires to God. An offering was either a sacrifice, and prayer is a spiritual sacrifice: 1 Peter ii. 5, ‘Ye are an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.’ As a man did then present himself and his offering before the Lord, so do we present ourselves and our desires, and pour out our hearts before him. Or an offering might be the mincāh, or meat-offering, which was baked or fried in a pan, and then presented to the Lord: Ps. xlv. 1, ‘My heart inditeth a good matter;’ not raw indigested services must be performed to God, such as are the eructations of the flesh; or incense was offered to the Lord: ‘Let my prayer be set before thee as incense,’ Ps. cxli. 2. And we read of ‘Vials full of odours, which are the prayers of the saints,’ Rev. v. 8. Incense was a mixture of sweet spices, which, being set on fire, the fumes thereof ascended into heaven; so do our holy and ardent desires ascend unto God.

3. They are desires presented in the name of Christ, in whom alone we are acceptable to God: John xvi. 23, ‘Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.’

4. They are desires of things agreeable to the will of God: 1 John v. 14, 'And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us.' All our desires must be regulated by his revealed will, and subordinated to his secret will, so far as God seeth it fit for his glory and our good; for upon other terms he is not bound to us.

Secondly, The kinds of prayer, so there are sundry distinctions.

1. There is mental prayer: Exod. xiv. 15, 'Wherefore criest thou unto me?' Moses cried unto the Lord, and yet no words are mentioned. And vocal prayer: Ps. v. 3, 'My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.' When prayers are put into language, or formalised into some outward expression. Again—

2. There is sudden and ejaculatory prayer; as Neh. ii. 4, 'The king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? so I prayed unto the God of heaven.' That is, some sudden dart of prayer, such as, 'Prosper, I pray, thy servant;' lifting up his heart in a sudden desire to God, to direct or give success to his petition. And solemn prayer, and of greater length: Rom. xv. 30, 'That ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me;' which words imply a prayer full of earnest pleadings.

3. There are public or church prayers: 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2, 'I exhort therefore that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings, and for all that are in authority;' where he giveth directions how the prayers of their public assemblies should be ordered. And private or family prayer: Acts x. 2, Cornelius is said to be 'a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, and gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always;' that is, a man that worshipped God with his family, as good men use to do. And it is said, 1 Chron. xvi. 43, that David, after public services, 'returned to bless his house;' that is, to pray for his family, as he had done for the people before. And secret and closet prayer, concerning which Christ giveth direction: 'When thou prayest, enter into thy closet,' Mat. vi. 6. Again—

4. There is ordinary and extraordinary prayer. Ordinary prayer is performed upon ordinary causes, such as daily necessities: Ps. lv. 17, 'Evening, and morning, and noon, will I pray, and cry aloud, and he shall hear my voice.' Extraordinary prayer is upon special weighty occasions, which requireth more than ordinary continuance of time and affection: Joel i. 14, 'Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God, and cry unto the Lord.' Now all these kinds of prayer are to be made conscience of, and none to be neglected; and in none of these cases must we cease to pray when God requireth it at our hands.

II. What it is to pray without ceasing. This needeth to be explained, because some strain it too far, others straiten it too much; and we must state the matter so as to avoid the extremes on both sides.

First, One extreme is that of the ancient Euchites, and because they seem to be befriended by the letter of the text, we must clear the

matter a little. Their senseless error was, as if the act of prayer were never to be discontinued, and therefore they omitted all other duties, and would only pray.

Secondly, The other extreme is of those who keep not up a constant frequent return of this duty. We must obviate both.

1. For those that would never intermit this exercise.

[1.] We must show them their error by explaining the word. A thing is said to be done continually and without ceasing, which is done at the constant times and seasons as often as they return. As David told Amasa, 2 Sam. xix. 13, 'Thou shalt be captain of the host before me continually;' that is, as often as the army was led forth; so 2 Sam. ix. 12, 'Mephibosheth did eat bread at the king's table continually;' that is, at the constant stated times of eating. So Rom. ix. 2, 'I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart;' that is, as often as he thought of them. So also is the word 'without ceasing' used, 1 Thes. ii. 13, 'For this cause we thank God without ceasing;' that is, as often as he was with God. So 2 Tim. i. 3, 'Without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers, night and day;' that is, evening and morning, as often as he went to God.

[2.] The matter may bear a good sense if you interpret the apostle's direction either—

(1.) Of the habit of prayer, or the praying temper; that frame of spirit or affection which is fit for prayer must never be lost: Ps. civ. 9, 'But I give myself unto prayer.' In the original there is no more 'but I prayer,' as if he were wholly made up of prayer and supplication; this was the work he was given to, or most intent upon.

(2.) It may be interpreted of a vital prayer. All duties may be resolved into prayer and praise. Now as the life of a christian is a life of love and praise, a kind of confession or hymn to God, so in other respects it is a prayer. *Semper orat, qui semper bene agit*; he that liveth in a constant obedience to God and dependence upon him, doth in effect always pray to him. Now thus doth a christian, both as to life natural and spiritual: Ps. xxv. 5, 'On thee do I wait all the day.' Every minute we depend upon him for the direction and support of his Holy Spirit. So Prov. xxiii. 27, 'Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long.' He liveth in an awful regard, loath to displease God because all cometh from him. Now this is virtually a prayer, because he still elevateth his thoughts and desires towards him, and looketh for all from God.

(3.) This praying without ceasing may be interpreted of our continuance in the duty, till we obtain the ends of prayer; and that some competent time is to be spent in it. Prayer is the lifting up of the heart, or the offering of our desires to God in some affectionate manner. In extraordinary occasions the time may be longer; as Christ spent whole nights in prayer: Luke vi. 12, 'He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.' On ordinary occasions the time may be shorter, but the general direction is, continue in prayer: Rom. xii. 12, 'Continue instant in prayer.' A short good-morrow is too slight a compliment for the great God; such interparlance with him is necessary as may warm the heart and serve the ends of prayer.

(4.) Praying without ceasing may express our perseverance in prayer without fainting: Luke xviii. 1, 'He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;' when we will not let God alone until he bless us. We must not yield to despondency, though we be not heard presently, but let us pray the more earnestly, though the prayer seemeth to be checked and contradicted by God's providence, as the woman of Canaan gets ground by discouragements, Mat. xv. 22-28. We must reiterate our petitions for one and the same thing till it be granted; as Paul prayed thrice: 2 Cor. xii. 8, 'For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.' A seeming repulse and denial maketh us the more, vehement; for the language of God's rebukes is, not to pray no more, but pray on still; it is yielding to a temptation to desist.

(5.) This praying without ceasing is to be interpreted of the universality and the frequency of the return of the occasions and opportunities of prayer; and we may be said to do that without ceasing which we do very often. So that though the act of prayer be intermitted, the course of prayer should not be interrupted; for we are to pray at all times, in all conditions, and in all businesses and affairs.

(1st.) At all times, never omitting the seasons of prayer, stated or occasional. There are stated times of prayer; something must be done every day. Thus our Lord directeth us to pray: Mat. vi. 11, 'Give us *σήμερον*, this day our daily bread.' Though it be mentioned but in one petition, yet it referreth to all the rest. We need daily bread, daily pardon, daily strength against temptations. Yea, there seemeth to be a double standing occasion; every day in the morning for direction, in the evening for protection; as God appointed a morning and evening sacrifice: Num. xxviii. 4, 'The one lamb shalt thou offer in the morning, and the other lamb shalt thou offer at even.' If any be contentious, let me tell you, it is an ill spirit that doth dispute away duties rather than practise them. So there are occasional times when God by his providence inviteth us to it, as by some special affliction: Ps. l. 15, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble,' or some business in hand, wherein we are to ask his leave, counsel, and blessing: Ezra. viii. 21, 'Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us and our little ones.'

(2d.) In all estates and conditions, afflicted and prosperous. In an adverse or afflicted estate: James v. 13, 'Is any among you afflicted? let him pray.' That gives vent to our sorrow, and turneth it into a spiritual channel. In a prosperous estate we are to pray that we may not forget God. Carnal men never come to him but when they have extreme need of him: Jer. ii. 27, 'But in the time of their trouble they will say, Arise, and save us.' That our hearts may not be corrupted, but our portion sanctified to us, for everything is 'sanctified by the word of God and prayer,' 1 Tim. iv. 5. Thus God must hear from us, sick and sound, in pain and well at ease, whether we are abased or abound.

(3d.) In every business, civil or sacred: 'In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths,' Prov. iii. 6. In business secular. Abraham's servant beggeth success in his errand: Gen. xxiv.

12, 'O Lord God of my master Abraham! I pray thee send me good-speed this day.' In matters sacred: 2 Thes. iii. 5, 'The Lord direct your heart into the love of God.' So that a serious sensible christian seldom wanteth an errand to the throne of grace, and if we be not strangers to ourselves, we cannot be strangers to God.

2. To the other extreme we now come, when men are rare and unfrequent with God, upon the pretence that they are not bound to pray always, and the time of duty is not exactly stated in the New Testament. To these we oppose other considerations.

[1.] Though there be not an express rule particularly set down how often we should be with God, yet duties are required in the strictest and most comprehensive terms, and God's expressions about them are very large. For here God saith, 'Pray without ceasing;' and Eph. vi. 18, 'Praying always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance.' So Col. iv. 2, 'Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.' So Ps. lxii. 8, 'Trust in the Lord at all times, ye people; pour out your hearts before him.' So Luke xxi. 36, 'Watch ye, therefore, and pray always.' So that here is no gap opened to loose and vain spirits to countenance them in their neglect of God. The scriptures rather speak over than under. Nature is apt to encroach upon grace, as the sea upon the banks, and sloth and strangeness to God will soon creep upon us; therefore the crooked stick is bent the other way. Rather pray always than be always in the world, and always in pleasures; at least take the due occasions. Though these expressions be not to be understood as if we should do nothing else but pray, yet they imply frequency in this duty, at all times when opportunity calleth for it.

[2.] The examples of the saints should move us. David prayed three times a day, at morning, noon, and night: Ps. iv. 17, 'Evening and morning and noon will I pray, and cry aloud.' So did Daniel, and would not omit it in times of persecution: Dan. vi. 10, 'Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house, and his windows being open in his chamber towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did afore time.' Now, though every one's necessities, abilities, or condition of life will not permit him to do so much, yet in the general we must conclude from thence that we must be constant in our daily worship and attendance upon God.

[3.] The ceasing of the daily sacrifice was accounted to be a great part of the misery occasioned by the abomination of desolation: Dan. ix. 27, 'And in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the over-spreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined, shall be poured upon the desolate.'

[4.] Now God trusts love, and would not particularly define the times of our duty and immediate converse with him, surely we should be more open-hearted and liberal to him. God expecteth much from a willing people: Ps. cx. 3. 'Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.' Our attendance upon God should be rather more than less, since it is left to our choice.

[5.] God himself was angry with his people, and complaineth of

their neglect of him : Jer. ii. 32, 'My people have forgotten me days without number.' Time out of mind, as we say in an English phrase, have I not heard from them. Now these considerations show this expression should not be too much straitened.

III. The reasons why constant and frequent prayer is our duty.

1. With respect to God, that we may acknowledge his being and sovereignty over us and all events that concern us and ours.

[1.] We acknowledge his being in prayer, for, 'He that cometh to God must believe that he is,' Heb. xi. 6. Men of all religions call upon that which they think to be God ; as in the storm, the pagan mariners 'cried every man unto his god,' Jonah i. 5. Men take their god to be their sure refuge in all their troubles, distractions, and fears. Now the people of God know him by experience to be the only true God that heareth prayer, therefore they own him as such : Ps. lxxv. 2, 'O thou that hearest prayer ! unto thee shall all flesh come.' Now this owning of God must not be done in a few rare and disused prayers, but in a constancy of prayer, that we may often call to mind his being and attributes. It is a sin not only to deny God, but to forget him : Ps. ix. 17, 'The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.' We are apt to forget God, who is an invisible being, though we have all things from him, and he be necessary to us continually ; therefore we must often remember him, and present ourselves before him, and inure ourselves to a reverence of his majesty. God complaineth, Jer. ii. 32, 'My people have forgotten me days without number.'

[2.] We acknowledge his supreme providence by taking all out of his hands, and so are kept more humble and in a constant dependence. We do not enjoy our mercies by chance or by good fortune, but by the gift of his providence. That we may not be forgetful of this, God will have us pray often, yea, thus solemnly take our daily bread out of his hands : Mat. vi. 11, 'Give us this day our daily bread.' The bread you eat is not your own, but God's ; you intrench upon his prerogative when you use it without asking his leave.

2. With respect to the nature of prayer. It is the converse of a loving soul with God, the nearest familiarity which a soul dwelling in flesh can have with him. Now acts of friendship and communion must not be rare and unfrequent, but constant and often, therefore called an acquainting ourselves with God : Job xxii. 21, 'Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace.' Acquaintance implieth frequent commerce and intercourse. Men that often visit one another, and meet together are acquainted. Prayer is a giving God a visit : Isa. xxvi. 16, 'Lord, in trouble have they visited thee.' The keeping up of this acquaintance is necessary both to our present comfort and future acceptance.

[1.] For our present comfort, it giveth you boldness to come to God in all your necessities and straits, if you daily wait upon him. Frequency of converse begets familiarity, and familiarity begets confidence. When God and you grow strange, you cannot come with that freedom to ask his help as those that familiarly converse with him do : Eph. iii. 12, 'In whom we have boldness, and access with confidence, by the faith of him.' A child is not afraid to go to his father, nor a man

unto his friend, to pour out his complaint into his bosom; nor a servant of daily attendance to open his suit to his master; they 'know his name,' Ps. ix. 10, and are acquainted with him.

[2.] For our future acceptance: Luke xxi. 36, 'Watch ye, therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man,' viz., at his coming. They that are constant in prayer make up their accounts with God daily, and so may with the better confidence attend his coming. When you have been frequently with him, frequently entertained by him and accepted with him, had your prayers heard and desires granted, it is a great encouragement in the hour of death, when you are to leave the world, and come immediately before him. On the other side, for men to appear before a God whom they never knew nor heartily loved, and with whom they were never acquainted as to any intimate communion and converse, this is a sad case. Alas! at the best it is to an unknown friend, but indeed it is to a certain enemy. They never had experience of his kindness which they would own, nor interest in his love, and now are forced into his presence against their will. Alas! how soon will the time come when men would fain set about prayer, but it is too late. They have then neither leisure nor skill to pray; and the prayers they then make are not the fruits of faith and love, but of despair and horror. They cry, Lord, Lord; but Christ saith, 'I know ye not; ye are workers of iniquity.' But on the other side, they are fitted for everlasting communion with God who are acquainted with him already; and when they come to be translated, they do but change place, not company. Heaven is an access to God, and the throne of grace is the porch of heaven. We begin the heavenly life here by these frequent converses with God, and our access to him now.

3. With respect to the new nature, or the temper and disposition of the saints. Prayer is the cry of the new creature, a work natural and kindly to the saints: Zech. xii. 10, 'I will pour upon the house of David, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication.' A spirit of grace will soon break out into supplications, and vent itself that way: Acts ix. 11, 'Behold, he prayeth;' Zeph. iii. 9, 'I will turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, and serve him with one consent.' In the margin it is a 'pure lip.' God's true children are carried to him by a kind of natural motion, as light bodies move upward; they are a sort of men that are seeking after God: Ps. xxiv. 6, 'This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob! Selah!' Therefore we should quite check and cross the bent and inclination of the new nature, unless we be much in prayer and often with God.

4. With respect to the necessities of the saints. Our wants are continual, as well in spiritual as in temporal things. That we need daily bread is evident to sense, and that we need daily pardon and daily strength against temptations should be as evident to faith. The soul hath its necessities as well as the body; yea, they are greater, and of a more dangerous nature. Sometimes we lack wisdom, and who shall give it us but God? James i. 5, 'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth

not, and it shall be given him.' Sometimes we lack strength, and that is to be sought in prayer: Eph. iii. 10, 'That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with all might by his Spirit in the inner man.' Sometimes we lack life and quickening, and to whom should we go but to the life-making Spirit, to him who quickeneth all things? In short, the throne of grace was set up for a time of need, and therefore, when our necessities drive us to it, we should not hang off: Heb. iv. 16, 'Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.' We always need to be delivered from evil; we always need to be established in good. Sometimes we need a blessing on what we have, that our comforts may be sanctified to us; sometimes a blessing on what we do, that we may begin it and end it in God. All our relations increase our necessities, so do all our enjoyments; new mercies occasion new necessities; and in the variety of our afflictions we have still somewhat to do with God. The receipt of one mercy discovereth the need of another.

5. With respect to the utility and profit of it. It is endless to instance in all things, I shall confine the discourse to spiritual profit, and there—

[1.] The three radical graces, faith, hope, and love, are acted and increased in prayer: Jude 20, 21, 'But ye, beloved, building up yourselves in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercies of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life!' Mark there, praying in the Holy Ghost is to be referred in common to them all, to building up yourselves in your most holy faith, to keeping yourselves in the love of God, to looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. Surely frequent prayer keepeth every grace active, and more ready than if it were seldom used.

(1.) For faith in this duty: the mysteries of our most holy faith are reduced to practice; even that great mystery of the trinity, and their distinct personal operations; we find the benefit of it in prayer: Eph. ii. 18, 'For through him we both have an access, by one Spirit unto the Father.' To the Father as an all-sufficient fountain of grace: Gen. xvii. 1, 'I am the Almighty God.' By Christ, who hath purchased leave, welcome, and audience: Heb. x. 19, 'By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.' And by the Spirit, who hath given us an heart to come, inspiring us with holy motions, enlivening our affections: Rom. viii. 26, 'Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities;' that we may open our hearts to God. If prayer be prayer indeed, not a few cold heartless words, then is faith solemnly acted.

(2.) Love is acted and increased in this duty, while we desire of God all things in order to God, and show forth our hearty groans after everything that will bring us nearer to himself; praying first for God's love, then the grace of the Redeemer, and all other subordinate blessings and helps as they relate thereunto. Yea, this very opening our hearts to God is a solace to us, and the fruit and act of our delight in him. The groans of the Spirit are the immediate issues of love, and come from a heart strongly bent to God and heavenly things. As faith directeth us to God as the first cause, so love to the chief

end, the glory of God, and regulateth all our choices and desires by it. The fruit of prayer increaseth love: Ps. cxvi. 1, 2, 'I love the Lord because he hath heard my voice and my supplications; because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.'

(3.) Hope is acted and increased by it, because in prayer this grace is predominant, the certain and earnest expectation of the promised glory. Our thoughts of heaven at other times are cold and heartless; here we enter into the holiest; we beg heaven, and all things in order to heaven, because we expect it from the mercy of God in Jesus Christ. There is desirous expectation in hopes, and prayer is but the expression of our desires, and a certain expectation in hope; so in prayer we plead promises, and show the grounds of our trust, why we look and wait for it, that God will preserve us, and bear our expenses to heaven.

[2.] The three duties pressed in this place are much promoted by frequent prayer: 'Rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks.'

(1.) 'Rejoice evermore.' We cherish our rejoicing, or peace and tranquillity of mind in all conditions, by frequent praying. This vent and utterance easeth us of our burden. If anything troubleth us, we go to God, who is able and willing to help us: Job xvi. 20, 'My friends scorn me, but mine eye poureth out tears unto God.' It is our comfort that there is a throne of grace before which to bring our complaint. So Phil. iv. 6, 7, 'Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ.' 'Be careful for nothing' is parallel to 'rejoice evermore.' What help have we to pray? 'Let your requests be made known unto God;' and the effect of prayer is 'the peace of God.' When the air is imprisoned in the bowels and caverns of the earth, there are shakings and terrible convulsions till it gets a vent; so is the soul tossed and turmoiled with many tormenting thoughts till we open our hearts to God. Hannah, when she had prayed, 'went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad,' 1 Sam. i. 18. Now should we not be frequent in this duty, which will keep up our delight in God, and our tranquillity of mind in all conditions on the confidence of his all-sufficiency?

(2.) 'Pray without ceasing.' The duty is promoted by the duty; pray without ceasing and you will pray without ceasing. The way to be fervent is to be frequent. A key that is seldom turned rusts in the lock; wells are the sweeter for the draining. We lose the habit of prayer and fitness for prayer when we are seldom with God, and there is such an intermission between duties. The more we walk, the fitter we shall be to walk; and the more we pray, the fitter we shall be to pray. They find so much sweetness in it that experiment it by practice, that they cannot be without it. It is the strangers to prayer that need to be persuaded. When we intermit this necessary work, we lose our fitness. He that hath often prayed will pray: Ps. cxvi. 2, 'Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.'

(3.) For the last duty, 'In everything give thanks.' They that

pray often see all things come from God, and they return all to God again; they take it out of his hands, and use it for his glory. Usually what we win by prayer we wear with thanksgiving. Others do not and cannot observe providence as much as they do that pray often and upon all occasions look to God. Besides, prayer sweeteneth the mercy: 'For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me my petition, which I asked of him: therefore have I lent him to the Lord as long as he liveth; he shall be lent to the Lord,' 1 Sam. i. 27, 28.

[3.] It is useful to preserve in us a sense of our duty to God, as it obligeth us to be more cautious and watchful. Who should be so careful of their conversations as they that come often into God's presence? They had need to be careful on a double account—

(1.) That they may be in a readiness always to pray: Eph. vi. 18, 'Praying always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance;' 1 Peter iv. 7, 'Be sober, and watch unto prayer.' If we would be often with God in prayer, we must watch against anything that would hinder our communion and intercourse with God, that we may look God in the face with comfort; as those that are always to appear in the presence of earthly princes must be more decently clad than other men. How shall we pray at night when we have been offending God all the day.

(2.) The very praying often inferreth an obligation of greater strictness, that we may be such out of duty as we profess to be in duty: 1 Peter i. 17, 'And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear;' 2 Tim. ii. 19, 'Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.' What! confess sin, and yet commit it? What! pray so zealously, and live so vainly! confute and contradict your prayers by your lives! ask grace so earnestly of God, and cast it away so carelessly in your conversations! Leave off one or the other, for hypocrisy is a double provoking thing, more than open profaneness.

Use 1. Is to reprove those that never call upon God, or very rarely, either in their families, or closets, or both. This cometh to pass—

1. Sometimes through a defect of their faith; they do not believe God's being and providence, and the promises of his holy covenant as made with us. They do not believe his being: Ps. xiv. 1, 'The fool hath said in his heart, 'There is no God;' and ver. 4, 'They call not upon the Lord.' The practical atheist doth not pray: Job xv. 4, 'Thou castest off fear, and restrainest prayer before God.' As the awe and reverence of God abateth in them, they cast off prayer, especially in secret. God's children may be straitened in prayer, but they do not restrain prayer. Conscience is clamorous; prayer would fain break out, but they smother these cheeks and sentiments of religion till they wholly quit a course of praying. Sometimes they deny providence: Ps. lxxiii. 11, 'They say, How doth God know? and is there any knowledge in the Most High?' and ver. 13, 'I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency;' Mal. iii. 14, 'Ye have said, It is in vain to serve God, and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?' Or else they do not soundly believe the covenant of God as made with them in Christ: Rom. x. 14, 'How shall they

call upon him in whom they have not believed?' We cannot address ourselves to God in Christ, if we are not rooted in the faith of the gospel.

2. Sometimes through a defect of their love to God. They have no delight in him, and therefore call not upon his name: Job xxvii. 10, 'Will he delight himself in the Almighty? will he always call upon God?' They may sometimes cry to him to be free from trouble, but they do not always call upon him, nor keep up a constant use of prayer. They are weary of God: Isa. xliii. 22, 'Thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; thou hast been weary of me, O Israel.' They that left their first love left their first works, Rev. ii. 3, 4. Or else they are glutted with worldly happiness, and so God is neglected: Jer. ii. 31, 'We are lords, we will come no more unto thee.' They are well and at ease, or else they are besotted with carnal pleasures, that they have no heart to come to God: Luke xxi. 34, 'Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and cares of this life.' The heart is withdrawn from God, and stolen away by carnal vanities.

3. From a defect in their hope; they despair either of assistance or acceptance.

[1.] Of assistance. Having such a wandering, lean, and barren understanding, and dead affections, they think they shall be never able to pray. And though God hath promised a Spirit of grace and supplication, and is ready to give it to those that do not give way to these evils, but strive against them, and the Holy Ghost is appointed to teach them to pray, yet they give way to this dulness and deadness, out of an indulgence to the ease of the flesh, and slothfulness and despair of God's help: Isa. lxiv. 7, 'And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee.' There is the lazy despair, as well as the raging despair, when men will not stir up themselves, and overcome the seeming difficulties which at first a course of prayer meeteth with.

[2.] Of acceptance. They have lost their peace by some grievous, wounding sin, and then have not the heart to go to God; as David kept silence, and hung off till he recovered his peace, Ps. xxxii. 3. So others have offended God, and represent him to themselves as an angry judge rather than a gracious father, and so run away from him as guilty Adam did to the bushes, Gen. iii. 8, rather than come to him. In part this may be in God's children when they have grieved the Spirit; but mostly it is in the wicked, who go on impenitently in some grievous and heinous sin, and so can have no heart to go on in a course of lively prayer. The presence of God is terrible to a sinner because of the conscience of their own sinful courses; they expect nothing but wrath and vengeance from God, and they will not take God's way to reconcile themselves, and make their peace with him, but only put off the thoughts of that they cannot put away, and neglect God rather than seek to appease him.

Use 2. It informeth us of a necessary truth; if we must pray evermore, then there must be an endeavour to keep up our hearts still in a praying temper, or in a disposition to go to God upon all occasions, that when God offereth these occasions, there may not want a suitable frame of heart. The disposition and temper of heart fit for prayer

must never be lost. Satan is a great enemy to this commerce with God, and our hearts soon grow unfit for it. It is a difficult thing to keep up this praying frame, yet this must be a christian's constant work and care. The whole spiritual life is but a watching unto prayer. Now this praying frame lieth in three things—

1. A broken-hearted sense of our spiritual wants. We have a quick and tender feeling of bodily wants, for these are evident to natural sense, and we love the body more than the soul, and are tender of our bodily interests; but we should be alike affected with soul-necessities, or else there will be no life in our prayers. God 'fillethe the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away,' Luke i. 53. The poor in spirit do most mourn before the Lord, and hunger and thirst after righteousness: Mat. v. 3-6, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.' Now, that which hindereth this brokenness of heart is carnal pleasures, which bring on a brawn and senseless deadness upon the soul. Therefore the apostle saith, I Peter iv. 7, 'Be sober, and watch unto prayer.' Now sobriety is a sparing use of sensual and worldly delights, or a moderation in all earthly things. This you must labour after, if you would keep up your correspondency with God by prayer in a lively manner.

2. A strong and earnest bent of heart towards God and heaven, and so towards spiritual and heavenly things: Isa. xxvi. 9, 'With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early.' The soul that is set to seek the Lord is most fit for this duty. But unless the heart be thus set towards God and heavenly things, prayer will be as a customary task; we shall ask for fashion's sake, pray from our memories rather than our conscience, and from our conscience rather than heart and affections; or from affections actually excited and stirred, rather than from an heart renewed, or that habitual bent and tendency towards God which is at the bottom of prayer. The heart sensibly stirred in one duty may do well for the time, but it is soon lost, and controlled and mastered by contrary affections. That which doth habitually dispose and incline you to pray always is the fixed bent of heart towards God and heaven. There are three agents in prayer, as in every holy duty—the human spirit, the new nature, and the Spirit of God. The human spirit, or my natural faculties, that by my understanding I may work upon my will and affections, and rouse up myself; for the Holy Ghost doth not work upon a man as upon a block. Then the new nature, which inclineth us to God as our chief good and last end; for the Holy Ghost doth not blow as to a dead coal. Then the divine Spirit, which exciteth those graces in us which incline us to God; as faith or a belief of his being, providence and covenant, love and desire of the full fruition of him in the heavenly glory, and hope of the means and end; of the means by which we attain the end, and the end that we shall thus enjoy by the means. These are the three agents in prayer and every holy work. I must do something as a reasonable creature, something as a new creature, and the Spirit influenceth all. The second we are now speak-

ing of. the new nature or inclination to God; which inclination is not barely natural as the inclination of creatures without life, as in fire or light bodies to ascend, or in a stone or heavy bodies to descend; but voluntary, as in a rational agent, and therefore it is not so indeclinably set but it needeth to be strengthened, excited, and increased in us; and this I now press you to if you would keep up your praying frame.

3. There is a liberty or confidence which ariseth from our peace and friendship with God: 1 John iii. 21, 'If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence, *παρρησιαν*, towards God.' When we walk unevenly, we grow shy of God; our mouths are shut, our prayers choked in the utterance. Therefore we should take heed we do not interrupt our peace: 1 Peter iii. 7, 'Dwelling as heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered.' Our access to God in prayer cannot be carried on so cheerfully unless we walk orderly and peaceably in our relations. A christian is very careful that he may not interrupt his communion with God, but must avoid heinous wounding sins. And because, do what we can do, daily infirmities will break out, he often renews his covenant with God, that his heart may be settled.

Use 3. To exhort us to pray without ceasing, Consider—

1. The throne of grace, which God hath erected in the midst of his people, standeth always upon. God doth not keep terms and days of audience. The high priest was not to be too familiar with God to come to him, but once in a year; but we may come every day: Heb. iv. 16, 'Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.' Let us then be often with God.

2. God's compassions and mercies never fail. There is an inexhausted treasure and stock of grace: James i. 5, 'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.' Compare this with Prov. xxv. 17, 'Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house, lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee.' You may come too seldom, but you can never come too often to God.

3. We owe this respect to God, that we must not go about his service by fits, but constantly. As the Queen of Sheba pronounced of Solomon's servants, 1 Kings x. 8, 'Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, that stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom;' much more may it be said of the servants of God, Prov. viii. 34, 'Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors.' It is a blessed thing to be much with God.

4. We never want occasions of praying, either for ourselves or for the church of God. Therefore we ought always to live in the sense of our own emptiness, and in the faith of God's fulness and willingness to supply our wants; always sensible of our need to pray, and always confident of God's readiness to answer and pray accordingly.

5. Love will not suffer us to keep long out of God's company. They that delight in one another must have their frequent meetings and frequent interviews. An instance of this we have in Jonathan and David: 1 Sam. xviii. 1, 'The soul of Jonathan was knit with the

soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul, and therefore he could not be long without his friend David. If we have a love to God, we cannot keep long out of God's company, but will be with him pouring out our hearts to him. Consider these things, that you may quicken yourselves to this duty of 'praying without ceasing.'

END OF VOLUME XVII.