

## SERMON UPON 2 SAMUEL VII. 27.

---

*Therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee.—2 SAM. vii. 27.*

THERE are several things remarkable in this context.

1. David's thankful mind, ver. 1, 2. I may illustrate it by the opposite practice of Nebuchadnezzar : Dan. iv. 30, 'Is not this great Babylon, which I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?' And of the Israelites in their new dwellings at Jerusalem : Hag. i. 2-4, 'This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built. Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it a time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?' All our comforts are used according to the temper of the party that enjoyeth them, either as an occasion to the flesh, or as incentives of godliness. A gracious spirit looketh upon common mercies as discovering their author, and pointing to their end ; they came from God, and must be used for God. A proper meditation for you when you enjoy commodious habitations, walk in your pleasant gardens, or get any repose and ease from troubles. In the midst of the plentiful accommodations of the present life, What have I done for God, who giveth me richly to enjoy all these things ?

2. Nathan's innocent and pious mistake : ver. 3, 'Go, do all that is in thine heart, for the Lord is with thee.' This Nathan spake not by a prophetic, but private spirit. The prophets might err when they spake out of their own human spirit, but as moved by the Holy Ghost they erred not. The prophet is to be excused, because the intention of David's zeal was good, and a meet expression of his thankfulness to God. God himself liked the intention in itself : 1 Kings viii. 18, 'The Lord said unto David my father, Whereas it was in thy heart to build an house unto my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart.' And besides, he might tell him, 'The Lord is with thee,' from former observation. God had accompanied David with his Spirit and blessing in all his enterprises. Well, then, this he said not by divine revelation, but of himself. Herein he was faulty, that he consulted not with God. And it teacheth us this lesson, that in all businesses of moment and concernment to God's glory, we must ask God's leave, and counsel, and blessing : Prov. iii. 5, 6, 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to

thine own understanding: in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.'

3. The next thing observable is the Lord's rectifying the prophet's mistake by a special revelation, ver. 4-17, wherein the Lord recapitulateth the several favours and honours he had put upon his servant David, with promises of blessing upon his family; but denieth him this one honour of putting his designs in execution of building him an house, because that was reserved for his son, a more peaceable prince, and whose hands were not defiled with blood. And it teacheth us this lesson, that we should be content with those other honours and favours which we have received at God's hands, though he in his wise providence deny us the liberty of perfecting some enterprises which we have designed for his glory. If God cut us off in the midst of our service, or interrupt us in our work, he knoweth how to carry it on by others; and it is a mercy that we have had his presence hitherto in former services. God had been with David whithersoever he went, but would not allow him to build him an house.

4. David's carriage upon this message: ver. 18, 'He went and sat before the Lord,' or abode in his presence, and expresseth himself both by way of praise and prayer.

[1.] Praise, in the 18th, 19th, and 20th, to the end of the 24th verse; acknowledging that all his goodness to him and his people came from his mercy and truth, for his word's sake, and according to his own heart, to fulfil his covenant, and his self-inclination to do good; admiring the greatness of these favours to such an unworthy creature as himself: 'Who am I, O Lord, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hither?' &c.; 'And is this the manner of man, O Lord God?' &c.

[2.] Prayer, from the 25th verse to the end; wherein he beggeth a performance of the things promised; showing that he should not dare to ask and expect these things if God had not prevented him by his word: 'Thou hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house; therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee.'

In which words there is a directory for prayer. And (1.) The qualification of the person, 'Thy servant;'; (2.) The sincerity of the prayer, 'Hath found in his heart;'; (3.) The instance and vehemency of it, in the doubling of the words; not simply 'to pray,' but 'to pray this prayer:': James v. 17, 'He prayed earnestly,' *προσευχῇ προσηύξατο*—he prayed in his prayer. It is one thing to say a prayer, another to pray a prayer. (4.) His reverence, 'Unto thee;'; or, as it is more emphatically repeated, 1 Chron. xvii. 25, 'Therefore thy servant hath found in his heart to pray before thee.' When we set ourselves as before the invisible God. And that may be part of the meaning of the phrase used, ver. 18, 'He sat before the Lord.'

But the main circumstance which I shall insist upon is that, 'Found in his heart.'

*Doct.* That the birthplace or proper rise of prayer is in the heart; or, whatever prayer we pray to God must be found in our hearts before it be uttered with our tongues.

*First,* I shall inquire concerning the sense and meaning of this expression, what it is to find a prayer in our hearts. That implieth

two things—when we pray as inclined, and pray as encouraged. And so David must be interpreted here: ‘I have found in my heart;’ that is, I am inclined by a due esteem and desire of the blessing promised; for he admireth it, and was exceedingly ravished with the thought of it, that God should have such respect to his house and family. Again, ‘I have found in my heart;’ that is, I am encouraged by the Lord’s goodness, and the experience of his blessing, and the assurance of his promises. So in every general case, all that would pray must find in their hearts to pray to God; that is, be inclined, and be encouraged.

1. We are inclined or stirred up to pray for such good things as we ask of God.

[1.] By a sense of our wants: James. i. 5, ‘If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God;’ and Heb. iv. 16, ‘Let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in a time of need.’ Our addresses to God must begin in a broken-hearted sense of our own wants, otherwise it is but an empty, careless, formal way of praying. We have a quick and tender feeling in all bodily necessities; the worst will express themselves sensibly enough in such cases: Hosea vii. 14, ‘They have not cried unto me with their hearts when they howled upon their beds; they assemble themselves for corn and wine, and they rebel against me.’ Those that rebelled against God howled upon their beds for corn and wine, as beasts will make their moan when pinched with hunger; but in soul-necessities we are not so sensible; and prayers put up without sense of want and need are but dead and lazy. Many think their condition so good that they need not trouble God about it, but they can manage it well enough themselves, and therefore either pray not at all, or without poverty of spirit, and their prayers are but an empty compliment to God. But now a godly man is sensible of his daily necessities; he is kept poor in spirit, and seeth that he cannot subsist a minute without God, and that he is environed with dangers, and obliged to a multitude of duties, which require assistance from above; that Satan is continually tempting, and he is continually sinning; and so he needs daily pardon, and daily sustentation, as well as daily bread: ‘Give us *σήμερον*, this day our daily bread,’ Mat. vi. 11; and that if he should forget to pray to God, he should forget to bid himself good-morrow or good-day. In short, the more men exercise themselves unto godliness, the more their necessities and wants will be discovered to them. Painted fire needeth no fuel, but real fire must still be supplied with matter for it to feed upon.

[2.] An esteem and value of the blessings asked. All such as pray aright must have a high estimation of what they seek; for if we do not set a value upon it, we shall neither seek it earnestly, nor will God care to give it us; for he will not thrust spiritual comforts upon them that despise them. Paul was so earnest to have Christ and his benefits, because he ‘counted all things but dung and dross that he might win Christ, and be found in him,’ &c., Phil. iii. 7–9. David prized communion with God, therefore sought it so earnestly: Ps. xxvii. 4, ‘One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I might dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.’ Temporal things are usually overprized, therefore these things are dispensed with a looser providence, without prayer, and many times to those that never

pray ; and to the godly by way of overplus, to direct us to value spiritual blessings, and to seek them in the first place : Mat. vi. 33, 'Seek first the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof, and all these things shall be added to you.' First in our prayers, as well as first in our endeavours.

[3.] Desire ; that must urge us to ask, and doth both open our mouths wide, and put life and vehemency into our requests and supplications. There is a good rule, that will be of general use to us : Desire nothing in your hearts but what you can pray for, and pray for nothing but what you desire. The former part checketh both worldly and fleshly lusts. Have I, or can I have, so little reverence for the Godhead as apparently to ask meat for my lusts, so much by the year, such dishes at my table, so much in lands and honours ? But the latter checks formality and deadness in prayer. Desire must go before and all along with the request, and the heart must be the fountain of the words ; otherwise it is but a vain babbling. Much speaking is not praying. Words are but the body, desires are the soul of prayer ; as the body without the soul is dead, so are words without a spirit of desire. Therefore we should be more careful of affections than words : Eccles. v. 1, 2, 'Be not hasty to utter anything before God,' &c. The prayer must be framed in such words as we can ; but our chief business is to awaken and call in our affections from wandering after worldly things, or to set our hearts to seek the Lord. The Spirit's help in prayer is not seen in the flow of words, but in *στεναγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις*, 'Groanings that cannot be uttered,' Rom. viii. 26 ; holy ardours and groans to God, and desires of his help. A prayer without life and affection is *thuribulum sine prunis*—a censer without fire.

[4.] Prayer must not only come from the present desires, but from the habitual inclination of the mind and heart towards God and heavenly things, which is the great effect of healing and sanctifying grace : Ps. cxix. 36, 'Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.' This is the radical inclination of grace, to be carried out to God, and all things that belong to God, as they more or less lead to him, more than to honours, pleasures, profits. As prayer is not a lip-labour, so it is not a work of the mere human spirit, or a fruit of memory and invention, but an exercise of grace. A man may exercise his natural faculties in prayer, when he doth not exercise the graces of the Spirit in prayer. Grace is given as the remote preparation to prayer : Zech. xii. 10, 'I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and supplication ; and they shall look on him whom they have pierced,' &c. We oftener pray from our memories than our consciences, and from our consciences than our affections, and from our affections as presently stirred, but soon checked and controlled, than from a fixed bent and inclination of heart towards heavenly things. A man may have wit and memory to pray when he hath not a conscience of praying. He may have an enlightened conscience when not a renewed heart, which may put us upon asking what we ought rather than what we really desire ; as Augustine speaketh of interlining his prayers with an *At noli modo ; timebam enim ne me exaudiret Deus*—Not yet, Lord ; and I feared lest the Lord should hear me. Or from a present affection stirring, when yet there

is not a rooted inclination: John vi. 34, 'Evermore give us of this bread,' compared with ver. 66, 'Many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.' Many desire pardon, desire the Spirit; but these desires are controlled by other desires, soon put out of the humour, and carried off by other things.

2. We are encouraged in prayer, and so we find it in our hearts to pray, by several things—

[1.] God's merciful nature: 2 Sam. vii. 21, 'According to thine own heart hast thou done all these great things.' *Ex mero motu*. God fetcheth not his reasons from without, but from his own bowels. His own self-inclination to do good doth sufficiently provoke him to it. Now God is the same to others that he was to David. His readiness to hear and to forgive doth encourage poor creatures to come to him. The full breast desireth to be sucked, as much as the hungry child to suck: Ps. lxxv. 2, 'O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.' God is ready to give audience, and doth wait for the coming of the humble supplicant, that mercy may be obtained in his own way.

[2.] His great love, showed to the world in Christ: Eph. iii. 12, 'In whom we have boldness, and access with confidence;' Heb. x. 19, 'Having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.' God out of Christ is inaccessible, but in Christ propitious. Now in the days of the gospel God doth not keep state as in the Jewish times: Num. i. 53, 'The Levites shall pitch round about the tabernacle of testimony, that there be no wrath against the congregation of the children of Israel;' Num. iv. 15, 'The sons of Kohath shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die;' and ver. 20, 'They shall not go in to see when the holy things are covered, lest they die;' the way to the sanctuary being not yet open. The people murmur at it: Num. xvii. 12, 13, 'The children of Israel spake unto Moses, saying, Behold we die, we perish, we all perish: whosoever cometh anything near unto the tabernacle of the Lord shall die: shall we be consumed with dying?' It was a grievous thing to them. But now the throne of grace is always open; God keepeth not terms of special days of audience; God in Christ is near to us, and we are near unto God in and by him, which much increaseth our love and confidence, and giveth us more familiar thoughts of God, who seemed before to be at an inaccessible distance. He hath taken the human nature unto himself. This should wonderfully reconcile the heart to God, and make our thoughts of him sweet and acceptable, when we come to pray to him. Christ will not be strange to his own flesh, as we are bidden, 'Not to hide ourselves from our own flesh,' Isa. lviii. 7.

[3.] His bountiful providence. His former kindness to David is mentioned all along the chapter, both by the Lord himself and also by David. God, that hath been good, will be good; for he wasteth not by giving, but is where he was: James i. 5, 'If any lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him;' as the fountain remaineth as full as ever, though it overflow and sendeth forth its streams. God delighteth that former mercies should be improved to future trust: 2 Cor. i. 10, 'Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us;' and to prayer: Phil. iv. 6, 'In

everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.' Promises should not lie by us as a dead stock: Ps. cxvi. 2, 'Because he hath inclined his ear to me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.' *Deus promittendo et donando debet*—God is a debtor both by his promises and by his gifts. He loveth to crown his own mercies, and to follow gift with gift; for he is not weary of giving.

[4.] His promises. The promises to encourage prayer are very large.

(1.) There are indefinite promises of audience: Ps. l. 15, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee;' Job xxii. 27, 'Thou shalt make thy prayer unto him, and he shall hear thee, and thou shalt pay thy vows.' So Isa. xlv. 19, 'I said not to the seed of Jacob, Seek me in vain.' Now these are mighty encouragements, and show us that it is not labour in vain to seek God; so that if there be not a commandment in our way to stop our requests, we have all the engagements in the world to come and acquaint God with all our desires, griefs, fears, wants, requests. We may find in our hearts to be dealing with him upon these encouragements; for what cannot God do? and what will not prayer do with a good God, who is readily inclined to his people, and able to do what he pleaseth, and hath promised to do what we desire?

(2.) There are promises of general universal concernment, that God will not only hear prayer, but do all that we desire of him. As John xiv. 14, 'If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it;' and Mat. xxi. 22, 'And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive;' Ps. xxxvii. 4, 'Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thy heart;' and many such expressions. Not that men have a lawless liberty allowed them to ask what they will, and God's power shall lackey after their vain fancies and appetites. No; these large and universal offers admit of a limitation propounded in scripture, and that then when these universal particles are mentioned these limitations are to be regarded, that you may not make promises to yourselves, and set God a task by your self-conceitedness and vain fancies, and think him engaged beyond what he is pleased to bind himself unto. But what are the limitations?

(1st.) That we ask righteously according to the matter. So you have the limitation: 1 John v. 14, 15, 'And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he heareth us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.' All the business is, what is the meaning of these words, 'According to his will'? *Ans.* With conformity to his revealed will, and with submission to his secret will. Surely with conformity to his revealed or commanding will, that we ask nothing unjust, or sinful, and seek to bring God to our lure, as Balaam, when he built altars, and sought to God for leave to curse his people. And that we ask nothing but what is agreeable to his secret will. Many things are lawful, yea, and commanded, as for parents to ask the conversion of their children, and it is our duty to use the means in order to it, but we must refer the success to God; God must be judge what shall be most for his glory. In short, we must ask according to his commanding will, with due respect to his

decreeing will: John xiv. 13, 'Whatever ye ask the Father in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. Whatever belongeth to our duty and the glory of God we must do; but for the event, how God will be glorified by either, we must submit it to God. So for lawful things: grace puts a restraint upon the will of a renewed man, that he seeketh nothing but what may be for the glory of God and his good. If he asketh other things and to other ends, he is prompted thereunto by his flesh, which maketh him lust after vain, empty, carnal satisfactions, to please his flesh.

(2*d.*) The next limitation is to the manner. If we ask them fervently, and with that life and seriousness which finding a prayer in the heart doth require. So Mat. vii. 7, 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you?' Prayers are not answered if the spirit of prayer be wanting, or that liveliness which is necessary to make it prayer, though the form and fashion of it be kept up. Men may pray, but that life which their necessity calleth for may be far to seek. When we set our face to seek the Lord God with prayer and supplication: Dan. ix. 3, 'I set my face unto the Lord God to seek by prayer and supplication;' Jer. xxix. 13, 'Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.' This sets the spirit of prayer a-work.

(3*d.*) The next qualification is of the person, as in the text, 'Thy servant;' so in other places: 1 John iii. 22, 'And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things which are pleasing in his sight;' that is, we are as certain we shall receive as if we had it already. If prayer should be performed with the greatest earnestness, and the greatest faith and confidence, yet if the consciences of men reprove them of any looseness and lightness of spirit, or that they have served God by halves, and are off and on with him in their practice, and look for good things from God, while they neglect their own duty and what is required of them, they cannot think that God should do it for them; they cannot look that God should be engaged any further than he hath engaged himself. So John xv. 7, 'If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.' If you be solicitous about the word of Christ, and the matters of duty contained therein, you have a great advantage at the throne of grace. So Ps. lxvi. 18, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.' Many that pray are as ice, a little thawed above, but hard at bottom; they have not such a strong settled resolution to walk more closely and orderly with God; but allow some secret lust, and so mar their own audience and acceptance with God.

*Secondly*, For reasons.

1. With respect to God—(1.) His observance; (2.) His acceptance.

[1.] With respect to God's observance. He is an all-seeing spirit, and therefore will not be mocked with a vain appearance or a little bodily exercise; but the prayers we make to him we must find them in our hearts: 1 Sam. xvi. 7, 'For God seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart.' We may act the parrot before men, but God looks to what there is in the heart: 1 Chron. xxviii. 9, 'Know thou the God of thy father, and

serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind ; for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts.' A man up in the air seeth the spring as well as the river and its course ; we that stand by see the course, but not the spring. God understandeth whether we are inclined and encouraged, whether we are habitually inclined to God : Jer. v. 3, ' O Lord, are not thine eyes on the truth ? ' Rom. viii. 27, ' And he that searcheth the heart knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.' He knows a belch of the flesh from a groan of the spirit. He understandeth our desires as well as our words ; so whether we are encouraged by the grace of the new covenant and sense of our own qualification : 1 John iii. 20, 21, ' If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.'

[2.] With respect to God's acceptance. God granteth not our prayers till our hearts be fixedly bent towards him : Ps. x. 17, ' Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble ; thou wilt prepare their heart ; thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.' When God hath put it into their hearts to pray, and awakened their desires, then he will hear : Dan. x. 12, ' From the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard.' God hath accepted the heart without the tongue, but never accepted the tongue without the heart. Moses cried to God when he spake not one word, Exod. viii. 12, and God heard him.

2. With respect to us.

[1.] The part which the heart beareth in all human actions. It is *fons actionum ad extra*, and it is *terminus actionum ad intra*. In our actings towards God : Prov. iv. 23, ' Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life ; ' and in our receipts from God this is the thing that God aimeth at : Rom. vi. 17, ' Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.' Prayer is not a receiving duty, as hearing. In praying the heart begins ; in hearing it ends the duty.

[2.] With respect to our carriage in prayer. We do not conceive a prayer, but impose a prayer upon ourselves, if the tongue guide the heart rather than the heart the tongue ; like children that cast stones into the mine, but do not draw ore out of the mine : Acts ii. 26, ' Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad.'

Use 1. Information.

1. What need is there of recollection before we come to pray, that we may not force upon ourselves what chance offereth, but may have a prayer in our hearts before we have it on our tongues : Ps. xlv. 1, ' My heart is inditing a good matter ; I speak of the things which I have made touching the king ; my tongue is as the pen of a ready writer.' Usually we offer to God a dough-baked sacrifice. Only, that I may not grate upon a tender conscience, there is a habitual preparation and an actual preparation.

The habitual preparation lieth in a broken-hearted sense of our wants, radiated inclination or bent of heart towards God and heavenly things, and in a confidence and liberty towards God.



The actual preparation lieth in such a sense of our necessities as the present case doth deserve; such a quickening of our desires after heavenly things as may fill us with life; such a remembrance of the grace of God in Christ, and our own sincerity, that our hearts may not reproach us when dealing with God as a father.

Again, I distinguish that our requests are ordinary or extraordinary.

Ordinary, when we ask daily supplies of grace, having no particular strait, temptation, difficulty, or business of moment then in hand. Here the habitual preparation, with little or no actual preparation, serveth in our daily prayers for necessary blessings.

Extraordinary, as in some notable trial, difficult strait, conflict, temptation, or when we seek some special benefit, and upon eminent occasions; then, as our necessities are greater, so our acts of prayer are more earnest: Ps. cix. 4, 'For my love they are my adversaries, but I give myself unto prayer.' Our Lord Jesus Christ, 'being in an agony, prayed more earnestly,' *ἐκτενέστερον*, Luke xxii. 44. And so it resolveth this case, What if I have not such a feeling of strong and earnest desire, or the overruling bent of the general inclination? Yet keep not off from prayer. (1.) Good desires are to be asked of God. (2.) Such desires as you have must be expressed. (3.) Prayer is the usual way to quicken and increase them. (4.) Turning away from God is the means to kill them.

2. It informeth us what need we have of more help than our own, if we must find every prayer in our hearts which we utter with our tongues. Three things are necessary in prayer; the human spirit or natural faculty, that I may by my understanding work on my will; the new nature, faith, hope, and love, to believe in God, and set him before me, to incline me to God as my chief good, and to hope for benefit from him; the divine Spirit to excite these graces: Jude 20, 'Praying in the Holy Ghost;' Rom. viii. 26, 'The Spirit itself also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered.' The Spirit works not on us as blocks, but as rational creatures; nor does it blow on a dead coal.

*Use 2. Caution.* Do not take everything for prayer which looks like it.

1. Bodily exercise. Many, by the agitation of the bodily spirits, work themselves into some vehemency; their voice is heard on high, but the heart is dead and cold, *quibus arteriis opus est*. These fill up only a little time with words; they pray for fashion's sake, but sit down with the work wrought; they pray, but do not look after the answer of prayers, as children shoot away their arrows, but mind not where they fall. They find it in their tongues, but not in their hearts.

2. Carnal vehemency. Men may lust and long, but do not pray: James iv. 2, 'Ye lust, and have not.' Motions of lust are violent and rapid: Ps. lxxviii. 18, 'They tempted God in their hearts by asking meat for their lust.' These ask things unlawful, or lawful things to a carnal purpose. Here is no gracious bent, for they do not prefer the best things in their desires: Mat. vi. 33, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof.'

3. The fluency of gifts. These make prayer the work of invention

and memory. The tongue exciteth the fancy, but the heart hangeth off from God. They that are carnal may come behind in no gift, but the affections do not keep pace with the expressions. These may personate faith, hope, and love; but they have not that real inclination, that meekness and humility, which is necessary for the addresses of a sinful creature to God.

#### 4. Natural fervency.

[1.] They may be instant and earnest for temporal blessings. They have no more to do with God, but only that he would deliver them from their troubles: Jer. ii. 27, 'In the time of their trouble, they will say, Arise and save us;' Exod. x. 17, 'Entreat the Lord your God, that he may take away this death only.' It is the temporal inconvenience they mind, more than the removal of sin; and they pray more to get ease of their trouble, than repent of their sins which procured them.

[2.] If they pray for spiritual things, it is but a dictate of conscience, not a desire of the renewed heart, and such as is seconded with constant endeavours to obtain what we ask of God, and submission to the means and terms upon which the suit may be granted.

[3.] They soon grow weary, and give over, if they be not speedily relieved: Isa. lviii. 3, 'Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not,' &c.; Mal. iii. 13, 'Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord; yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee?' 2 Kings vi. 33, 'He said, This evil is of the Lord; what should I wait for the Lord any longer?'

[4.] And usually there is more of murmuring than of prayer in their addresses to God. And that fervency which seemeth to be in them floweth not from humility, love, and hope, but from pride, bitterness, and diffidence; their prayers are muddy, full of passions, doubts, and fears.

*Use 3.* To exhort us to find in our hearts whatever prayer we make to God.

1. In private prayer. Let us come as inclined by love, as encouraged by faith and hope.

[1.] As inclined by love. So we ask of God all things in order to God. We first pray to God for God, and next for the grace of the Redeemer, and then for all other subordinate blessings: Ps. lxxiii. 25, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.' Whatever quiets us in the neglect of God, or want of God, is esteemed more than God.

[2.] As encouraged by faith and hope.

(1.) By faith; believing the being and bountiful nature of God: Heb. xi. 6, 'He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' And believing his many promises, which are Yea and Amen in Christ: 2 Cor. i. 20, 'For all the promises of God are in him Yea, and in him Amen.' Believing his gracious relation to those in covenant with him: John xx. 17, 'I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God;' Mat. vi. 32, 'Your heavenly Father knoweth you have need of these things;' Luke xii. 32, 'Fear not, little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.'

(2.) By hope, which is a certain and desirous expectation of the asked and promised blessing. None can come to God aright but those that hope to be the better for coming. Christ has taught us 'how to pray, and not to faint,' Luke xviii. 1; Luke xi. 7-9, with 11-13. God's not answering us is no call to us to give over, but to go on still. There is hope in waiting, however matters go. It is best to resolve to lie at Christ's door, rather than take our answer and go away. Our perseverance should show how we are affected with our wants, and how resolutely we adhere unto and depend upon God; though he seem not to pity us, but to pursue us with his strokes.

2. In prayer with others. If either God direct their tongues to speak to our case, or in general requests suited to the necessity of all christians, we must find it in our hearts, or else we are under a distemper. Prayer is nothing else but the language of faith, love, and hope; of faith, a believing of God's being and bounty, that he is willing and able to succour us; of love, which directeth us to the prime fountain of all the good we have and would have, and to the end, the glory of God, and regulateth all our choices by it, and to those means which conduce to the enjoying of God; and of hope, which is a desirous expectation of the promised blessing. If we have a holy fervour, a confidence in the power and goodness of God, a sense of need, and hope in his mercy, we cannot but find it in our hearts. Prayer is the language of an upright heart feeling its own wants, and craving a supply of God. Prayer is a work of the inner man, not lifting up the voice, but the heart to God; it is the yearning of the Spirit: Rom. viii. 26, 'The Spirit itself maketh intercession in us, *στεναγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις*, with groanings that cannot be uttered.' Hannah 'spake in her heart, only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard,' 1 Sam. i. 13. The cry of the lips doth not pierce the clouds: Eccles. v. 2, 'Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter anything before God.' Have a care of raw, tumultuary, undigested thoughts. A man should beforehand meditate on his wants and the necessities of others, that he may be affected with them. Certainly prayer must be gone about with reverence. Some rush upon prayer profanely, others carelessly. (1.) Some profanely; they go from their pots to prayer. They let loose their hearts, eat and drink without fear and sobriety, profane their mouths with light and unfruitful speech, and yet presently call to prayer, as if every frame of spirit were fit for this work. (2.) Others carelessly; prayer is gone about with little or no reverence at all; some talking, some trifling, some working, some toying till the very instant of prayer, yea, till he that prayeth in the name of the rest be upon his knees, and hath begun the prayer, which is offered up to God in all their names; as if they had their hearts at command in a moment. Oh! how can they come before God with that confidence, reverence, humility, and fervency that is required in holy prayer, when they come reeking hot from their worldly occasions? Then for the matter of these prayers. There are certain common blessings which we and others continually stand in need of, and for which we are continually to pray; as the increase of faith, patience, meekness, love, and the like. Do you desire these things? God will not reject the desires of an humble, contrite heart.

Many things we desire, and lawfully may desire, which are not matters of that moment that we should acquaint God with them, or seek to interest providence in them. We do not expect, nor is it needful to require, any special work of his for the performance of them; it is not seemly so to do; as in a lawful game, a man may desire to win rather than to lose, but it is not fit he should make a prayer for it.

*Object.* But if another pray, and I join with him, how do I find it in my heart?

*Ans.* This is principally meant of personal secret prayer, when we uncover our own sore, confess the 'plague of our own heart,' 1 Kings viii. 38. Then the rule is, we must fit and proportion our words to our matter, and both matter and words to our minds and hearts.

---