

SERMON XIV.*
THE
GLORY AND INTEREST
OF
NATIONS PROFESSING THE GOSPEL.

* This sermon was preached, at a private Fast, to the Commons assembled in Parliament.

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
THE
COMMONS OF ENGLAND
ASSEMBLED IN PARLIAMENT.

I NEED not give any other account of my publishing this ensuing short discourse, than that which was also the ground and reason of its preaching, namely, your command. Those who are not satisfied therewith, I shall not endeavour to tender farther grounds of satisfaction unto, as not having any persuasion of prevailing if I should attempt it. Prejudice so far oftentimes prevails even on good soils, that satisfaction will not speedily thrive and grow in them. That which exempts me from solicitousness about the frame and temper of men's minds and spirits, in the entertainment of discourses of this nature, is the annexing of that injunction unto our commission in delivering the word of God: it must be done, 'whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear.' Without therefore any plea, or apology, for whatever may seem most to need it in this sermon, I devolve the whole account of the rise and issue it had, or may have, on the providence of God in my call, and your command. Only I shall crave leave to add, that in my waiting for a little leisure to recollect what I delivered out of my own short notes and others (that I might not preach one sermon, and print another), there were some considerations that fell in exciting me to the obedience I had purposed. The desire I had to make more public, at this time and season, the testimony given in simplicity of spirit to

the interest of Christ in these nations, and therein to the true, real interest of these nations themselves, which was my naked design openly managed and pursued with all plainness of speech (as the small portion of time allotted to this exercise would allow), was the chief of them. Solicitations of some particular friends gave also warmth unto that consideration. I must farther confess, that I was a little moved by some mistakes, that were delivered into the hands of report, to be managed to the discountenance of the honest and plain truth contended for, especially when I found them without due consideration exposed in print unto public view. That is the manner of these days wherein we live. I know full well, that there is not any thing from the beginning to the ending of this short discourse, that doth really interfere with any form of civil government in the world, administered according to righteousness and equity; as there is not in the gospel of Christ, or in any of the concernments of it. And I am assured also that the truth proposed in it, inwraps the whole ground of any just expectation of the continuance of the presence of God amongst us, and his acceptance of our endeavours about the allotment and just disposal of our civil affairs. Let others lay what weight they will or please, upon the lesser differences that are amongst us on any account whatever; if this shield be safe, this principle maintained and established that is here laid down, and the just rights of the nation laid in a way of administration suited unto its preservation and furtherance, I shall not easily be cast down from my hopes, that amongst us poor, unprofitable, unthankful creatures as we are, we may yet see the fruit of righteousness to be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for evermore. For those then who shall cast their eye on this paper, I would beg of them to lay aside all those prejudices against persons

or things, which their various contexture in our public affairs may possibly have raised in them. I know how vain, for the most part, expectations of prevailing in such a desire, by naked requests are. But sick men must be groaning, though they look for no relief thereby. Wherefore committing it into that hand, wherein lie also your hearts and mine, I shall commend it for your use unto the sovereign grace of him, who is able to work all your present works for you, and which is more, to give you an inheritance among them that are sanctified. So prays,

Your servant in the work of

Our Lord Jesus Christ, and his gospel,

JOHN OWEN.

SERMON XIV.

Upon all the glory shall be a defence.—ISA. iv. 5.

THE design of this chapter is to give in relief against outward perplexing extremities from gospel promises, and the presence of Christ with his people in those extremities. The next intendment of the words in the type, seems to relate to the deliverance of the people of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, and the presence of God amongst them upon their return; God frequently taking occasion from thence, to mind them of the covenant of grace, with the full ratification and publication of it by Christ, as is evident from Jer. xxxi. and xxxii. and sundry other places.

As to our purpose, we have considerable in the chapter: The persons to whom these promises are given; the condition wherein they were; and the promises themselves that are made to them for their supportment and consolation.

First, The persons intended are the remnant, the escaping, the 'evasion of Israel,' as the word signifies, ver. 2. they that are left, that remain, ver. 3. who escape the great desolation that was to come on the body of the people, the furnace they were to pass through. Only in the close of that verse, they have a farther description added of them, from the purpose of God concerning their grace and glory; they are written among the living, or rather written unto life; 'every one that is written,' that is, designed unto life in Jerusalem.

As to the persons in themselves considered, the application is easy unto this assembly: Are you not the remnant, the escaping of England? Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? Are you not they that are left, they that remain from great trials and desolations? The Lord grant that the application may hold out, and abide to the end of the prophecy.

Secondly, The condition that this remnant, or escaping had been in, is laid down in some figurative expressions concerning the smallness of this remnant, or the paucity of them that should escape, and the greatness of the extremities they should be exercised withal. I cannot insist on parti-

culars ; it may suffice that great distresses and calamities are intimated therein ; and such have the days of our former trials and troubles been to some of us.

Thirdly, The promises here made to this people, thus escaped from great distresses, are of two sorts : Original, or fundamental ; and then consequential thereon.

1. There is the great spring, or fountain promise, from which all others, as lesser streams do flow ; and that is the promise of Christ himself unto them, and amongst them ; ver. 2. He is that branch of Jehovah, and that fruit of the earth, which is there promised. He is the bottom and foundation, the spring and fountain of all the good that is or shall be communicated unto us ; all other promises are but rivulets from that unsearchable ocean of grace and love, that is in the promise of Christ ; of which afterward.

2. The promises that are derived and flow from hence, may be referred unto three heads : (1.) Of beauty and glory, ver. 2. (2.) Of holiness and purity, ver. 3, 4. (3.) Of preservation and safety, ver. 5, 6.

My text lies among the last sort, and not intending long to detain you, I shall pass over the other, and immediately close with that of our present concernment.

Now this promise of ver. 5. is of a comprehensive nature, and relates to spiritual and temporal safety or preservation. Godliness, though it be not much believed, yet indeed hath the promises of this life, and that which is to come.

I shall a little open the words of the verse, and thereby give light to those which I have chosen peculiarly to insist upon. It is, as I have said, safety and preservation, both spiritual and temporal, that is here engaged for ; and concerning it we have considerable.

[1.] The manner of its production ; I will create it, saith God. There is a creating power, needful to be exerted, for the preservation of Zion's remnant. Their preservation must be of God's creation. It is not only not to be educed out of any other principle, or to be wrought by any other means ; but it must, as it were by the almighty power of God, be brought out of nothing ; God must create it. At least, as there were two sorts of God's creatures at the beginning, that dark body of matter, whose rise was merely from nothing ; and those things which from that dark con-

fused heap he made to be other things than what they were therein ; it is of the last sort of creatures, if not of the first. If the preservation of this remnant be not out of nothing, without any means at all ; yet it is for the most part from that darkness and confusion of things, which contributes very little or nothing towards it ; I will create it, saith God ; and whilst he continues possessed of his creating power, it shall be well with his Israel.

[2.] For the nature of it, it is here set out under the terms of that eminent pledge of the presence of God with the people in the wilderness, for their guidance and protection in the midst of all their difficulties and hazards, by a pillar of cloud, and a flaming fire ; this guided them through the sea, and continued with them after the setting up of the tabernacle in the wilderness forty years. The use and efficacy of that pillar, the intendment of God in it, the advantage of the people by it, I cannot stay to unfold : it may suffice in general, that it was a great and signal pledge of God's presence with them for their guidance and preservation ; that they might act according to his will, and enjoy safety in so doing. Only whereas this promise here respects gospel times, the nature of the mercy promised is enlarged, and thereby somewhat changed. In the wilderness there was but one tabernacle, and so consequently one cloud by day, and one pillar of fire by night, was a sufficient pledge of the presence of God with the whole people : there are now many dwelling-places, many assemblies of mount Zion ; and in the enlargement of mercy and grace under the gospel, the same pledge of God's presence and favour is promised to every one of them, as was before to the whole. The word we have translated ' a dwelling place,' denotes not a common habitation, but a place prepared for God ; and is the same with the assemblies and congregations in the expression following. The sum of all is, God, by his creating power, in despite of all opposition, will bring forth preservation for his people, guiding them in paths wherein they shall find peace and safety.

Only ye may observe the order and dependance of these promises ; the promise of holiness, ver. 4. lies in order, before that of safety, ver. 5. Unless our filth and our blood be purged away, by a spirit of judgment, and a spirit of burn-

ing, it is in vain for us to look for the pillar and the cloud. If we are not interested in holiness, we shall not be interested in safety; I mean, as it lies in the promise, and is a mercy washed in the blood of Jesus; for as for the peace of the world, I regard it not. Let not men of polluted hearts, and defiled hands, once imagine that God cares for them in an especial manner. If our filth and our blood, our sin and our corruption abide upon us, and we are delivered, it will be for a greater ruin; the way unto the cloud and pillar, is by the spirit of judgment and burning.

The words of my text are a recapitulation of the whole verse; and are a gospel promise given out in law terms; or a New Testament mercy, under Old Testament expressions.

I shall then briefly shew you these two things: 1st. What is here expressed, as to the type and figure; 2dly. What is here intended, as to the substance of the mercy promised.

1st. For the figure; by the glory and defence, a double consort, or two pairs of things seem to be intended: The ark, and the mercy-seat; the tabernacle, and the pillar of fire.

(1st.) For the first; the ark is oftentimes called the glory of God; Psal. lxxviii. 61. 'He gave his strength into captivity, and his glory into the hand of his enemies.' Where he speaks of the surprisal of the ark by the Philistines, which when it was accomplished, Phineas's wife called her son Ichabod, and said, the 'glory is departed;' 1 Sam. iv. 21. The word which we have rendered 'a defence,' properly signifies 'a covering;' as was the mercy-seat the covering of the ark. So that 'upon the glory shall be a defence,' is as much as unto you, the 'mercy-seat shall be on the ark,' or you shall have the mercy represented and intimated thereby.

(2dly.) The tabernacle and cloud, or pillar of fire, are also called to mind; so the words are expressive of that figure of God's gracious presence with his people, which we have recounted, Exod. xl. 34. 'Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.' So it continued, the glory of God was in the tabernacle, and the cloud upon it, or over it; as the word here is; and so 'upon all the glory there was a defence.'

2dly. I need not stay to prove that all those things were typical of Christ. He was the end of the law, represented

by the ark, which did contain it; Rom. x. 3, 4. He was the mercy-seat, as he is called, and said to be, Rom. iii. 25. 1 John ii. 2. covering the law from the eye of justice, as to those that are interested in him. He was the tabernacle and temple wherein dwelt the glory of God, and which was recompensed with all pledges of his gracious presence.

Apply then this promise to gospel times, and the substance of it is comprehended in these two propositions:

I. The presence of Christ with any people, is the glory of any people.

This is the glory here spoken of, as is evident to any one that will but read over the second verse, and consider its influence unto these words. 'The branch of the Lord shall be to them beautiful and glorious, and upon all the glory shall be a defence.'

II. The presence of God in special providence over a people, attends the presence of Christ in grace with a people.

If Christ the glory be with them, a defence shall be upon them; what lies else in allusion to the mercy-seat, not drawn forth in these propositions, may be afterward insisted on.

I. For the first: What I pray else should be so? This is their glory, or they have none: Is it in their number, that they are great, many, and populous? God thinks not so, nor did he when he gave an account of the thoughts of his people of old. 'The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any people, for you were the fewest of all people;' Deut. vii. 7. God made no reckoning of numbers; he chose that people that was fewest of all: he esteemed well of them, when they were but 'a few men in number, yea, very few, and strangers;' Psal. cv. 12. You know what it cost David in being seduced by Satan into the contrary opinion. He thought the glory of his people had been in their number, and caused them to be reckoned; but God taught him his error, by taking off with a dreadful judgment no small portion of the number he sought after. There is nothing more common in the Scripture, than for the Lord to speak contempt of the multitude of any people, as a thing of nought; and he takes pleasure to confound them by weak and despised means.

Is it in their wisdom and counsel, their understanding for the ordering of their affairs? Is that their glory? Why, see how God derides the prince of Tyrus, who was lifted up with an apprehension hereof; and counted himself as God, upon that account; Ezek. xxvii. 3—6, &c. The issue of all is, ‘Thou shalt be a man, and no God, in the hand of him that slays thee;’ God will let him see in his ruin and destruction, what a vain thing that was, which he thought his glory. Might I dwell upon it I could evince unto you these two things :

1. That whereas the end of all human wisdom in nations, or the rulers of them, is to preserve human society in peace and quietness, within the several bounds and allotments that are given unto them by the providence of God, it so comes to pass for the most part through the righteous judgment and wise disposal of God, that it hath a contrary end, and bringeth forth contrary effects throughout the world. Do not the inhabitants of the earth generally owe all their disturbance, sorrow, and blood to the wise contrivance of a few men, not knowing how to take the law of their proceedings from the mouth of God, but laying their deep counsels, and politic contrivances, in a subserviency to their lusts and ambition? And what glory is there in that which almost constantly brings forth contrary effects to its own proper end and intendment?

2. That God delights to mix a spirit of giddiness, error, and folly in the counsels of the wise men of the world; making them reel and stagger in their way like a drunken man, that they shall not know what to do, but commonly in their greatest concernments, fix upon things as devoid of true reason, and sound wisdom, as any children or fools could close withal. ‘He taketh the wise in their own craftiness, and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong;’ Job v. 13, 14. so at large, Isa. xix. 11—14. and now where is their glory? I could give instances of both these, and that plentifully in the days and seasons that have passed over our own heads. The like also may be said of the strength, the power, the armies of any people; if their number and wisdom be vain, be no glory, their strength, which is but the result or exurgency of their number and wisdom, **must** needs be so also. But you have all this summed up together, Jer. ix.

23, 24. 'Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord.' It is neither wisdom, nor might, nor riches, that is our glory; but our interest in Jehovah only.

This I say is in the presence of Christ only.

Now Christ may be said to be present with a people two ways.

(1.) In respect of the dispensation of his gospel amongst them, the profession of it, and subjection to the ordinances thereof. The gospel of Christ is a blessed gospel, a glorious gospel, in itself, and unto them that embrace it. But yet this profession separated from the root from which it ought to spring, is not the glory of any people; Christ is not their glory, who are his shame. Empty profession is the shame of Christ in the world; and shall not be others' glory. The apostle tells us that this may consist with a litter of unclean lusts, making them in whom it is abominable to God and man; 2 Tim. iii. 4, &c. If the bare profession of the truth would render a nation glorious, oh, how glorious were this nation! So would have been the people of old, who cried, 'The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.' But when men profess the truth of Christ, but in their hearts and ways maintain and manifest an enmity to the power of that truth, and to all of Christ that is in reality in the world, this is no glory.

(2.) Christ is present with a people in and by his Spirit, dwelling in their hearts by his Spirit and faith, uniting them to himself. I do not distinguish this from the former as inconsistent with it: for though the former may be without this, yet where this is, there will be the former also. Profession may be without union, but union will bring forth profession. There may be a form of godliness without power: but where the power is, there will be the appearance also. Now when Christ is thus present with a people, that is, they are united to him by his Spirit, they are members of his mystical body, that is their glory. Be they few or many in a nation that are so, they are the glory of that nation, and nothing else: and where there is the most of them,

there is the most glory: and where they are diminished, there the glory is eclipsed. Christ mystical, the head, and his body is all the glory that is in the world. If any nation be glorious and honourable above others, it is because of this presence of Christ in that nation. Christ is the glory of his saints, Isa. iv. 2. in him they glory, Isa. xlv. 25. and the saints are Christ's glory; 2 Cor. viii. 23. They are the glory of Christ, and he glories in them, as God of Job, to Satan: 'Seest thou my servant Job?' chap. i. 8. He doth as it were glory in him against the wickedness of the world; and Christ in them, and they in him, are all the glory of this world. So Zech. ii. 8. Christ was in the pursuit of the collection of his people from their dispersion: what seeks he after; what looks he for? he goes after the glory; even to find out them who are God's glory in the world.

Now this is the glory of any people upon a threefold account.

[1.] This alone makes them honourable and precious before God. So says God of them, Isa. xliii. 1. 'I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine;' those are they of whom I spake: what then? ver. 4. 'Thou art precious in my sight, thou art honourable, I have loved thee;' how doth God manifest his valuation of them? ver. 3. Why he will give all the world, the greatest, mightiest, wealthiest nations for them, ver. 5. all is as nothing in comparison of them, who are his portion, and the lot of his inheritance. The Lord keep this alive upon your hearts, that that may be in your eyes the glory of this nation, on the account whereof it is precious to God, and honourable in his sight.

[2.] Because this presence of Christ makes men comely and excellent in themselves, with what eye soever the world may look upon them. The whole world out of Christ lies in evil, under the curse of God, and defilement of sin: in all the glittering shows of their wealth and riches, in the state and magnificence of their governments, the beauty of their laws and order (as they relate to their persons) they are in the eye of God a filthy and an abominable thing, a thing that his soul loatheth. Curse and sin will make any thing to be so: but now Christ is to them and in them beautiful

and glorious; Isa. iv. 2. Christ is so in himself, and he is so unto them, and makes them to be so. There is through him beauty, and excellency, and comeliness, every thing that may make them lovely and acceptable. That the world looks not on them as such, is not their fault, but the world's misery: it looked on their master Christ himself, the brightness of his Father's glory, who is altogether lovely, the chiefest of ten thousand, with no other eye; Isa. liii. 2. They are so in themselves, and are so to Christ; being exposed indeed to many temptations, oftentimes they are made black and sully by them: but yet they are comely still; Cant. i. 5. The ways whereby they are made black, for the most part we have expressed, ver. 6. when the sun shines on them, and they are made keepers of the vineyard, it comes upon them. Prosperity and public employment oftentimes so sully them, that they are made black to the reproach of the world: but yet to Christ who forgives, and washes them, they are comely. Yea, this is all the excellency that is in the world. Sin with honour, with wealth, with power, with wisdom, is a deformed and contemptible thing: it is grace only that is beautiful and glorious: it is the gracious only that are excellent in the earth; Psal. xvi. 3.

[3.] This alone makes any truly useful unto others; and that either for preservation or prosperity.

1st. Here lies the preservation of any nation from ruin. Isa. lxxv. 8, 9. 'Thus saith the Lord, As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants' sakes, that I may not destroy them all.' This is the blessing in the cluster, the hidden and secret blessing, for the sake whereof, the whole is not destroyed. The remnant left by the Lord of hosts, Isa. i. 9. that keeps the whole from being as Sodom or Gomorrah. If Elisha, a servant of the Lord, told the king of Israel in his distress, that if he had not regarded the presence of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, he would not so much as have spoken to him; how much more will the Lord himself let a people know in their distress, that were it not for the regard he hath to his secret ones, he would not take the least notice, as to relief, of them or their concerns? Sodom could not be destroyed until Lot was deli-

vered. The whole world owes its preservation and being to them, whom they make it their business to root out of it: they are as the foolish woman, that pulls down her own house with both her hands. It is not your counsels, you know how they have been divided, entangled, insnared; it is not your armies, as such; what have they been to oppose against the mighty floods that have risen up in this nation? and they also have been as a reed driven to and fro with the wind (mankind is no better; John the Baptist says it of himself); but it is this presence of Christ in and with his, that hath been the preservation of England, in the midst of all the changes and revolutions that we have been exercised withal; Micah v. 5.

2dly. Not only preservation, but prosperity is from hence also: Micah v. 7. 'And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people, as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, that waits not for the sons of men.' It is the remnant of Jacob of whom he speaks, that is, this people of Christ, with whom he is so present as hath been manifested; and where are they? They are in the midst of many people, in their inside, in their bowels; they are woven by their relations and employments into the bowels of the nations; and on that account there is neither this nor any nation about us, but shall spin out their mercies or their misery from their own bowels; their providential fates lie in them; as is their deportment towards this remnant, such will their issue be. But what shall this remnant do? Why it shall be 'as dew from the Lord,' and as 'showers on the grass.' It shall be that alone which makes them fruitful, flourishing, and prosperous; it may be it will be so, provided there be good assistance, counsel, and strength, to carry on their affairs: yea, blessed be God for counsels and for armies; he hath made them useful to us: but the truth is, the blessing of this dew depends not on them, it tarrieth not for man, it waiteth not for the sons of men: it will be a blessing, let men do what they will it depends not on their uncertain and unstable counsel, on their weak and feeble strength. This remnant is as the ark in the house of Obed-edom, as Joseph in the house of Potiphar, all is blessed and prospered for their sakes. It is not the glorious battlements, the painted windows, the

crouching antics that support a building, but the stones that lie unseen in or upon the earth. It is often those who are despised and trampled on, that bear up the weight of a whole nation. All the fresh springs of our blessings are in Zion.

It were easy to manifest that in all our late revolutions we have turned on this hinge. According as the presence of Christ with his people, in the power of his Spirit, hath received entertainment in these nations, so hath our state and condition been. For many years before the beginning of these troubles the land had been full of oppression, I mean, in respect to the people of God. Poverty, imprisonment, dangers, banishment, reproaches were their portion. God was long patient; at length the height of their adversaries came to this, that they set not themselves so much against their persons or ways, as against the Spirit of Christ in and with them: that was made their reproach, that the by-word wherewith they were despised in the mouths of their adversaries, and the profane multitude: when things were come to this, that the very presence of Christ with his people was made the direct object of the hatred of men, the Lord could bear it no longer; but sware by himself, that time should be given them no more: in this very house he raised up saviours and deliverers on mount Zion to judge the mount of Edom; and how did he carry on this work? 'Not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts,' as Zech. iv. 6. even by that very Spirit which had been reviled and despised. Give me leave to say, the work of judging this nation was carried on by the presence of the Spirit of Christ with his in faith and prayer: it was not by prudence of counsels, or strength of armies above that of our enemies, that we prevailed, but by faith and prayer; and if any one be otherwise minded, I leave him for his resolution to the judgment of the great day, when all transactions shall be called over again. The adversaries themselves I am sure acknowledged it, when they openly professed, that there was nothing left for them to overcome, or to overcome them, but the prayers of the fanatic crew.

After some years' contending, when the Lord had begun to give us deliverance by breaking the power of the enemy, at least in this nation, besides those bitter divisions that fell

out among the people of God themselves, and the backsliding of some, to the cause and principles they had opposed, this evil was also found rising again amongst us; slighting, blaspheming, contemning under several pretences, of the Spirit and presence of Christ in and with his saints: you know what ensued; what shakings, what revolutions, with new wars, bloodshed, and desolation, over the three nations. And give me leave to remember you as one that had opportunity to make observations of the passages of providence in those days, in all the three nations, in the times of our greatest hazards; give me leave, I say, to remember you, that the public declarations of those employed in the affairs of this nation, in the face of the enemies, their addresses unto God among themselves, their prayers night and day, their private discourses one with another, were, that the preservation of the interest of Christ in and with his people was the great thing that lay in their eyes; and that if it were not so, they desired that God would stop them in their way, yea, rather cause their carcasses to fall in the high places of the field, than to prosper them in that which should be contrary thereunto: and we know what ensued. How we have used our mercies is another matter: this was the principle that prevailed with God and man.

Use 1. If you desire the glory of these nations, labour to promote the interest of Christ in these nations. I am not speaking unto you about disputable things, differences among the people of God themselves, nor am I interposing my advice in your civil affairs, but I speak in general about those with whom Christ is present, by his Spirit, his chosen ones, against whom there is an old enmity in Satan and the world. The glory of these nations is, that there is a people in them, that have Christ in the midst of them; let it be your business to take care for that glory. But how shall we do it?

(1.) Labour personally, every one of you, to get Christ in your own hearts. I am very far from thinking that a man may not be lawfully called to magistracy, if he be not a believer; or that being called, he should be impeded in the execution of his trust and place, because he is not so; I shall not suspend my obedience whilst I inquire after my lawful governor's conversion; but yet this I say, considering

that I cannot much value any good, but what comes in by the way of promise, I confess I can have no great expectation from them whom God loves not, delights not in; if any be otherwise minded, I shall not contend with him; but for this I will contend with all the world, that it is your duty to labour to assure Christ in your own hearts, even that you may be the better fitted for the work of God in the world. It is the promise of God to Zion, that her 'officers shall be peace, and her exactors righteousness,' Isa. lx. 17. and then shall she call her 'walls salvation, and her gates praise;' ver. 18. It will be little advantage to any, to have the work of God raised in the world, and not to have the foundation-stone laid in their hearts. If there should be in any of you an enmity unto Christ and the power of godliness, a hatred and contempt of the people of God, an evil heart of unbelief, an evil course of life, worldliness, oppression, vanity of mind, &c. would it advantage you to be intrusted with power in these nations? Would it not hasten your destruction, and increase your account? It is a noble promise that we have, Isa. xxxii. 17. 'And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.' It is a gospel righteousness that is spoken of; and that not of the cause as such only, but of the persons; the persons being righteous, and that with the righteousness of Christ, the effects mentioned shall follow their righteous undertakings; we have peace now, outward peace; but alas, we have not quietness, and if any thing may be done that may give us quietness, yet perhaps we may not have assurance; we may be quickly shaken again; but when the righteousness of the persons and cause meet, all the rest will follow.

(2.) Set yourselves to oppose that overflowing flood of profaneness, and opposition to the power of godliness, that is spreading itself over this nation. Know you not that the nation begins to be overwhelmed by the pourings out of a profane, wicked, carnal spirit, full of rage and contempt of all the work of reformation that has been attempted amongst us? Do you not know that if the former profane principle should prove predominant in this nation, that it will quickly return to its former station and condition, and that with the price of your dearest blood? And yet is there not already

such a visible prevalency of it, that in many places, the very profession of religion is become a scorn; and in others, those old forms and ways taken up with greediness, which are a badge of apostacy from all former engagements and actings? And are not these sad evidences of the Lord's departing from us? If I should lay before you a comparison between the degrees of the appearances of the glory of God in this nation, the steps whereby it came forth, and those whereby it seems almost to be departing, it would be a matter of admiration and lamentation; I pray God we lose not our ground faster than we won it. Were our hearts kept up to our good old principles on which we first engaged, it would not be so with us; but innumerable evils have laid hold upon us; and the temptations of these days have made us a woful prey; gray hairs are here and there, and it will be no wonder if our ruin should come with more speed, than did our deliverance. O then set yourselves in the gap; by all ways and means oppose the growth of an evil, profane, common, malignant spirit amongst us. But I haste.

(3.) Value, encourage, and close with them, in and with whom is this presence of Christ. They are the glory of the nation; its peace, safety, and prosperity will be found wrapped up in them. I know there lie divers considerable objections against the practice of this duty; I shall name some few of them, and leave the exhortation unto your considerations.

[1.] Who are those persons in whom is this presence of Christ? Are they such as profess indeed religion, but neglect all rules of righteousness; that would be accounted godly, but care not to be honest? The marks of whose miscarriages are written on their foreheads; are not these so far from being the glory that they are the shame of any nation? I pray give me leave to endeavour the rolling away of this great stone of offence, in these few ensuing considerations.

1st. Then, I shall willingly lay this down for a principle, that he is not religious, who is not also righteous; as also I shall not much value his righteousness, who is not religious. He that is righteous doth righteousness; he doth so, in the bent of his spirit and course of his ways and walkings. If a man be froward, heady, high-minded, sensual, unjust, oppressive, worldly, self-seeking, a hater of good men, false,

treacherous, let him pretend to what he will, that man's religion is in vain; he may have a form of godliness, but he hath not the power of it. This principle we shall agree upon.

2dly. There have been in the days wherein we live, many false professors, hypocrites, that have thought gain to be godliness, by reason of whose wicked lives, ways, and walking, the name of God hath been evil spoken of; and woe to them by whom these offences are come; but yet also woe to the world because of offences; if these offences turn off men from an esteem of the remnant of Christ in whom is his presence, woe to them also. I acknowledge these days have abounded with offences; but woe to them who are turned aside by them from owning the portion and inheritance of Christ.

3dly. It cannot be denied, but that many of them who do belong unto Christ, have woefully miscarried in these days. 'O tell it not in Gath, publish it not in Askelon;' oh that our souls could mourn in secret on that account, that we could go backward, and cover the nakedness and folly of one another; but alas, this hath been far from being our frame of spirit; we have every one spread the failings of his brother, before the face of men and devils; but yet notwithstanding these miscarriages, those that are the people of Christ, are his people still; and he loves them still, whether we will or no; and commonly those who are least able to bear with the miscarriages of others, have most of their own.

4thly. That differences of judgments in civil affairs, or church matters, ought not presently to be made arguments of men not being righteous. Some men think that none are righteous that are not of their principles, than which principle there is nothing more unrighteous. Let men that differ from them walk never so holily, profess never so strictly; yet, if they are not of their mind, they are not righteous. If men are offended on such accounts, it is because they will be so.

5thly. This hath ever been the way of the men of the world; that when any have been unblamable and zealous upon the account of religion, they will attempt their reputation, though without any ground or colour, upon the account

of righteousness. So suffered the Christians of old; and so the Puritans of former days, unjustly and falsely, as God will judge and declare. The world then in this matter is not to be believed; the common reports of it are from the devil, the accuser of the brethren, who accuses them in the same manner before God night and day. These are but pretences, whereby men ignorant of the mystery of the gospel, and the power of grace harden themselves to their ruin.

6thly. This remnant of Christ with whom his presence is, who are the glory of a nation, is to be found only amongst the professors of a nation. For,

[1.] Although, of those who are professors, there may be many bad, yet of those that are not professors, there is not one good. Where there is faith there will be a profession. If I should not know well where to find them, I am sure I know where I cannot find them; I cannot find them in the ways of the world, and conformity to it; in darkness, ignorance, neglect of duty, and utter unacquaintedness with gospel truths, the gifts and graces of the Spirit; there I cannot find them; I shall not say of them, 'Behold the Lord's anointed,' let their outward worldly appearance be what it will. Now by the help of these considerations, those who have in themselves principles of life and light in Christ, will or may be, setting aside their temptations, enabled to discover this generation of the Lord's delight; and for others, I cannot take down the enmity that God hath set up. So then, notwithstanding this objection, I shall certainly esteem this remnant of Christ to lie among those, who having received gospel light, and gospel gifts evidently, do make also profession of gospel grace, union and communion with Christ, separation from the world, and the ways of it, in a conversation acceptable unto God in Christ; and to this portion shall I say as Ruth to Naomi, let what will be glorious, or uppermost in the world, 'Whither thou goest, I will go; where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. The Lord do so to me and more also, if ought part thee and me:' with them let my portion be, and the portion of my family, whatever their lot and condition in this world should be; and the Lord say, Amen.

[2.] But it will be said secondly, We are still at a loss; for what woful divisions are there amongst this generation

of professors? Some are for one way, and some for another; some say one sort are the people of God, some another; some say the Prelatists are so, some the Presbyterians, some the Independents, some the Anabaptists, some the Fifth Monarchy-men, some others; and on whom should the valuation pleaded for be cast?

To this I answer,

1st. Some do say so, and plead thus, it cannot be denied; but the truth is, the greater is their weakness and folly. It is impossible men acquainted with the Spirit of Christ and the gospel, should say so, unless they were under the power of one temptation or other. But it is no party, but the party of Christ in the world, and against the world, the seed of the woman, against the seed of the serpent that I am pleading for; that men as to their interest in Christ should be judged from such denominations, as though they make a great noise in the world, yet indeed signify very little things in themselves, is most unrighteous, and unequal; nor will men find peace in such rash and precipitate judgments.

2dly. There may be many divisions amongst the people of God, and yet none of them be divided from Christ the head. The branches of a tree may be entangled by strong winds, and stricken against one another, and yet none of them be broken off from the tree itself; and when the storm is over every one possesses its own place in quietness, beauty, and fruitfulness. Whilst the strong winds of temptations are upon the followers of Christ, they may be tossed and entangled; but not being broken off from the root, when he shall say to the winds, 'Peace, be still,' they will flourish again in peace and beauty.

3dly. Let not Satan cheat you of your duty, by this trivial objection. If he can keep you from duty, whilst he can make divisions; he hath you sure enough. They of whom I speak, be they under what reproach or obloquies soever, they are all true men, all the children of one father, though they are unhappily fallen out by the way.

Use 2. Of encouragement to those that have the presence of Christ with them in the manner declared; they shall be safe; in vain it is for all the world to attempt their security; either they shall not prevail, or they shall mischief themselves by their own prevalency; Micah v. 8. As they shall be a

dew where they are appointed for a blessing, so as a lion where they are oppressed. Destruction will come forth on their account, and that terribly like the destruction of a lion, speedily in passing through it shall be done. And whence is it that this feeble generation shall be as a lion? It is from the presence of Christ among them, who is the lion of the tribe of Judah, and to honour them, he assigns that to them, which is his own proper work; let men take heed how they provoke this lion; for the present, Gen. xlix. 9. he is 'gone up from the prey, he stoopeth down, he coucheth as a lion, and as an old lion, who shall rouse him up?' He hath taken his prey in these nations, in the destruction of many of his enemies; he seemeth now to take his rest, to couch down, his indignation being overpast, but who shall rouse him up? Why what if he be provoked? what if he be stirred up? why he will not lie down, 'until he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain;' Num. xxiii. 24. There is no delivery from him; no, but what if there be a strong combination of many against him, will he not cease and give over? Isa. xxxi. 4. Be they who they will, the shepherds of the people, be they never so many, a multitude of them, let them lift up their voice and rage never so much, all is one, he will perform his work and accomplish it; until you have him in the condition mentioned, Isa. lxiii. 1—6. Blessed are the people that are under his care and conduct, yea, blessed are the people whose God is the Lord.