

SAINT PAUL'S CHALLENGE.

What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?—ROM. VIII. 31.

THE words are a glorious conclusion and triumph of faith: the conclusion upon all the former particulars in the chapter, and the foundation of all the comforts that follow after, to the end of the chapter. They are as the centre of the chapter. All the beams of heavenly comfort in this divine chapter, they meet, as it were in one, in this short clause, 'What shall we say then to these things?' &c.

In the words, briefly, there is *first a question*, 'What shall we say to these things?'

And *then a triumph*, 'If God be with us, who can be against us?' It is a question answered with another question, 'What shall we say to these things?' He answers it with another question, 'If God be with us, who can be against us?'

'What shall we say to these things?'

To these things before mentioned. If we be in Christ, there is no condemnation to us; if we be led by the Spirit, if we be heirs of heaven and fellow-heirs with Christ, if we suffer with him, if we have the spirit of prayer to help our infirmities in the worst conditions, if all creatures groan with us, and if all work for our good, if God from all eternity hath written our names in heaven by election, and separated us from the rest of the world in vocation, and hath sanctified and justified us, and will after glorify us, 'what shall we say to these things?'

The heart of man is full of doubtings and misgiving, full of thoughts: 'According to the multitude of my thoughts, thy comforts refreshed my soul,' Ps. xciv. 19. A multitude of thoughts and a multitude of comforts. There is comfort after comfort, because there are thoughts after thoughts, and surmises after surmises. There is no waste comfort set down in this

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chapter; and when he hath set down all, he comes and concludes in a triumphant manner, 'What shall we say to these things?' He propounds the *quare* to himself, he catechiseth his own heart and others. If these things be so, what can be said against them? Surely the unbelieving, doubting, dark, rebellious heart of man hath many things to say against divine truths; for though divine truths be lighter than the sun, and there is no greater evidence of anything in the world, yet they find no place in the unbelieving heart. Let God say what he will, the doubting heart is ready to gainsay it. But these truths are so pregnant and clear, that it is a wonder that anything should be said against them: 'What shall we say to these things?'

Again he means, what comfort can you have more? What can you desire more? What can be said more? What use will you make of all that hath been said? What will you suck out of it? If all this be true that hath been spoken before, that a Christian is so elevated above the common condition; if God love him from everlasting in election, and to everlasting in glorification; if in the middle time all shall work for the best, what comfort can the heart of man desire more? and what use can you make of this for courage and for comfort for the time to come? These things are implied in this question, 'what shall we say to these things?'

Use. It is good often to propound *quares* and demands to our own hearts, when we read or hear divine truths; to ask our own hearts, You have heard these things, what say you to them? For whatsoever God saith in his word will do us no good till we speak to our own hearts, and be convinced of it, and say it is so. Therefore we should say to ourselves, Here are many comforts and duties pressed, but what sayest thou to it, my heart? Dost thou not stand out against comforts and advice? 'It is no matter what God saith, unless he overpower the unbelieving heart to say, 'What shall I say to these things?' Shall I not agree with God and his Spirit, and his comforts? Shall they be best in regard of an unbelieving heart? Oh no! Therefore let our care be to store them in the treasury of our memory, which should be like the pot of manna, to contain heavenly comforts. Let us treasure up all the truths we can, all will be little enough when we shall need comfort. But when we have them in our memory, let us ask ourselves, Are these things so or no? If they be so, believe them; if they be not so, then let us give liberty to ourselves, and away with hearing and reading, &c. If they be so, for shame let me yield to them.

Let us ask these questions with some fruit; let us deal thus with our own hearts, often call them to account whether we believe or no; for we have such a faculty and power, we can reflect upon ourselves. And we ought to desire of the Spirit of God to teach our hearts to reflect upon themselves, to examine whether we know, and if we know, whether we believe, and what use we make of these things, and why we should live thus? Doth this life and course of mine agree with these principles? The best of us all are tardy this way. Therefore let not that part without making some use of it. But I proceed to that I will more dwell on,

'If God be for us, who can be against us?'

Here is first a ground laid, and then a comfort built upon it. The ground that is laid is, 'If God be with us.' When he saith, 'If God be with us,' he doth not put the case, but lays it as a ground. 'If God be with us,' as indeed he is with all his in electing them, in calling them, in working all for their good, in glorifying them after, &c., 'If God be with us,' as he

is, then this comfort is built upon this ground, 'who shall or can be against us?'

For the first, the ground that is laid is, that *God is with his children.*

Indeed, he is with the whole world. He is everywhere; but he is with his church and children in a more peculiar manner. The soul is spread in the whole body, but it is in the brain after another manner, as it understands and reasons. God is everywhere; but he is not everywhere comforting, and directing, and sanctifying, nor everywhere giving a sweet and blessed issue. So, besides the general respect, that I will not now stand on, God is 'with us' that are his in a more peculiar manner in all his 'sweet attributes: in his wisdom to direct us, with his power to assist and strengthen us, by his grace and love to comfort us; and he is with us in all our perplexities, to stay our souls. He is with us by his sweet and gracious mercy, to feed us with hidden manna, with secret comforts in the midst of discomforts. When there is no comfort else with us, then God is with us; and then he is with us in the issue of all that a godly man takes in hand in his name. He is with him in all crosses, to direct and turn them to his best good; 'All things work for the best to them that love God,' Rom. vi. 23. He is with them in all his sweet relations as a gracious Father in covenant, as a husband. He is with them in those sweet comparisons: as a hen, Mat. xxiii. 37; as an eagle, to carry them on his wings above all dangers, as he carried the Israelites in the wilderness, Deut. xxxii. 11. He is with them in all comfortable relations.

Therefore God, in the Scriptures, borrows names from everything that is comfortable. He is with them as a rock, to build on; as a shield, to defend them; in the time of heat and persecution, he is a shadow, to keep them from the heat; he is with them as a light. Christ is our life in death, our light in darkness, our righteousness in sinfulness and guilt, our holiness in impurity, our redemption in all our miseries. There is somewhat of God in every creature; therefore God takes names from his own creatures, because there is some strength or comfort in them. God gives himself variety of names, as there are variety of our distresses. Are we in misery? God is a rock, a shield, a tower of defence, a buckler; he is all that can be said for comfort. He is with us in his attributes and sweet relations, and all sweet terms that may support our faith, that whatsoever we see comfortable in the creature, we may rise more comfortably to God, and say, God is my rock and shield, and my light and defence.

And then God is with us in every condition and in every place whatsoever. He is not only a God of the mountains and not of the valleys, or a God of the valleys and not of the mountains, as those foolish people thought, 1 Kings xx. 28, but he is in all places, and at all times with his. If they be in prison, he goes with them: Acts xvi. 22, *seq.*, he made the prison a kind of paradise, a heaven. If they be banished into other countries, he goes with them; 'I will go with thee, O Jacob, into Egypt, and bring thee back again,' Gen. xlviii. 21. If they be in death, he is with us to death and in death: 'In the valley of the shadow of death, thou art with me,' Ps. xxiii. 4. At all times whatsoever, and in all conditions, God is with us.

In all our affairs whatsoever God is with us. 'Fear not,' Joshua; 'fear not,' Moses. What was the ground of their comfort? 'I will be with thee.' He was with St Paul in all conditions, therefore he bids him 'fear not,' Acts xxvii. 24. So our blessed Saviour, the head of all, in Acts x. 38, in the speech of Peter to Cornelius, he did all things well, 'for God was with him.' You see how God is with his children.

What is the ground that the great, and holy, and pure God, blessed for ever, should be with such sinful and wretched creatures as we are? that he should not only be with us, and about us, and compass us as a shield, but be in us?

The ground of all is his free love in Christ. Christ was God with us first. God, that he might be with us, ordained that Christ should be God with us; 'Emmanuel,' that he should take our nature into unity of person with himself. Christ being God with us, that he might satisfy the just wrath of God for our sins, and so reconcile God and us together, he hath made God and us friends. So that this, that God is with us, it is grounded upon an excellent and sound bottom; upon the incarnation of our blessed Saviour, that for this very end, that God might be with us, was God with us; that is, he was God and man, to bring God and man together; he was God and man in one, to bring God and man, that were at contrary terms, to terms of reconciliation; to recollect and bring us back again to God, from whence we fell. So the reason why God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are with us, it is because Christ, the second person, God and man, is with us, or else there could be no such sweet terms as these are. You see how it is founded. Christ took our nature, and advanced and enriched it. Now he having taken our nature and our persons to be one with him, how near are Christ and we together! There is one common Spirit in him and us, one common Father, 'I go to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God,' John xx. 17. There is one common kingdom and inheritance. We are fellow-heirs with him. Oh, how near is Christ to us! Our souls are not so near our bodies as Christ is to us, and God in Christ. So you see this, that God is with us. It is founded upon an excellent, wonderful, comfortable mystery. This I suppose is clear; therefore I come to that I intend further to enlarge; that is, the comfort built upon this ground, 'If God be with us, who shall be against us?'

One would think this a strange question; for a Christian no sooner comes to be one with Christ, and so to be reconciled to God, but he hath against him all the powers of hell; and then he hath the whole world against him presently, Satan's kingdom; and then he hath an enemy that is worst of all, that stirs up strife and rebellion and contention even in his own heart, his own flesh. So that we may say, who is not against a Christian? If God be with us, all else but God will side against us. There are two grand sides in the world, to which all belong. There is God's side, and those that are his; and there is another side, that is, Satan's, and those that are his; two kingdoms, two seeds, two contrary dispositions, that pursue one another, till all the one be in hell, Satan and all his seed together, the devil and all that fight under his banner, that are led with his malignant, poisonous spirit. Though it may be they cannot do more hurt, or do not out of politic respects, though they have poisonous hearts, yet these never leave contending till they be in hell; and the other never leave till they be in heaven together. Christ makes it his prayer, 'My will is, that where I am, they may be also,' John xvii. 24, and his will must be performed; so that he need not ask the question, 'If God be with us, who shall be against us?' There will be enow against us.

It is true. But in what sense are they against us, and how far are they against us?

They are thus far against us in their wit,* in their plots and policies; in their wills they would devour all if they could. They are against us in

* That is, 'wisdom.'—G.

their endeavours. They do what they can against the church and people of God. They are against us in their prevailing likewise. Their endeavours are not idle, but prevail very far over God's people, even to insolency: 'Where is now their God?' Ps. xlii. 10, as it is oft in the Psalms, and to the dejection of God's people; 'The Lord hath forsaken me; the Lord hath forgotten me,' Ps. xxxi. 12. God's people are brought very low, to the pit's brink; the pit almost shuts her mouth upon them. So you see they are against them many ways. God gives a great length to their tether.

And many reasons God hath to let them prevail, both to draw out their malice the more, and then to shew his people their corruptions the more, and then to exercise their graces in waiting, and for the just confusion of their enemies at the latter end, and for the sweet comfort of his children at the end—when God sees the fittest time to meet with the enemies—that they might have sweet experience of God's seasonable care, however God put off a long time for some respects. So you see they may prevail a long time. Yet who can be against us in this sense, that is, to prevail altogether? Who shall be against us, so far as to have their will in the issue? They prevail a great way. What do they intend? Not to prevail over the person of God's church and people, but the cause, which, in spite of Satan and his instruments, and all, must stand invincible to the end of the world. They intend likewise to prevail over the courage of God's people. That they cannot neither; for Saint Paul saith after, in this chapter, 'In all these things we are more than conquerors,' Rom. viii. 37; that is, abundant conquerors, a strange high term. But in some sense we are more than conquerors; for if we consider what weak persons God's children are, what strong enemies they have, and what weak means they prevail with in the sight of the world, to flesh and blood, that such persons should prevail over such enemies, by such weak means as they do, in this respect, they are more than conquerors. So he may say, 'Who can be against us?' that is, to have their wills, to overthrow the cause of Christ, and the courage of God's children; they may prevail in this or that particular, but at the last all their plots and counsels shall prove abortive, and bring forth a lie. All is but to magnify God's power the more in letting them go so far, and then to dash all their moulds and plots. God's children, they have the devil and all his company, the world and the flesh [against them]. But there is God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost for them, the blessed Trinity, that are able to blow away the other three, and all the strength and support they have whatsoever.

'Who shall be against us?'

It is not a question of doubting, or inquisition to learn anything, but it is a question of triumph. He doth, as it were, cast a bank, and bid defiance to all enemies whatsoever. 'Who shall be against us?' Let them stand out, Satan and the world, and all Satan's supports; let them do their worst. There is a strange confidence which is seated in the hearts of God's children, that they dare thus dare hell and earth, and all infernal powers; they set God so high in their hearts, that they dare say with a spirit of confidence, 'Who shall be against us?' The meaning is not, who shall be against us, to take away our lives or liberties, &c. As the speech is, they may kill us, but they cannot hurt us. The worst they can do is to send us to heaven, and make us partakers of that we desire most. First, we desire that God will be with us here; and, secondly, that we may be with God in heaven. They make God's children partakers of their desires by killing

of them. Let tyrants and all persons that have a malignant disposition to the church of God, and armed with power, let them do their worst, the cause must stand impregnable. Christ will have a church and kingdom in the world, and their spirits will be impregnable against them. They may kill them, but they cannot hurt them; they may kill them, but they cannot kill their courage. As we see in the martyrs, there was the Spirit of God in them above all the dealings of the persecutors; there was a fire of God's Spirit in them above all outward fire whatsoever. You see it must be taken for granted, that the church of God and every particular Christian hath many enemies against them, as it is Ps. cxxix. 1, 'From my youth up,' saith the church, 'they have fought against me, but they have not prevailed.' From my youth up; from Abel to the last saint that shall be in the world, there will be always some against God's people, yet their comfort is that none shall be against them to prevail, either over the Spirit of God in them, or over the cause that they manage.

Use. First of all you see then, that the state of a Christian in this world is an impregnable state, and a glorious condition. Here is glory upon glory, from this clause to the end of the chapter: 'If God be with us, who shall be against us? If God gave his Son for us, shall he not with him give us all things else?' There is another glorious speech, 'Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's people?' Another glorious triumphant speech, another glorious speech, 'Who shall separate us from the love of God founded in Christ?' He loves Christ first, and us in Christ as members; and as he loves them* eternally, so he loves us eternally too. Therefore you see every way the state of a Christian is a glorious condition. 'Who can be against us?' You see the state of God's people. It is an impregnable and glorious condition. Then by this means those that are strange paradoxes to flesh and blood, yet they agree in a Christian. He is never alone. When he is alone, God is with him; the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are with him, angels are with him. God is not only with him, but his guard is with him; and God's Spirit is with him, and in him victoriously both in grace and comfort. Christ saith to his disciples, when they thought to leave him alone; saith he, you cannot leave me alone, 'my Father is with me,' John viii. 16; and St Paul towards his latter end, that had deserved so well of the Christian world: 'All forsook me,' saith he, 'but the Lord forsook me not, but delivered me out of the mouth of the lion,' 2 Tim. iv. 17. So a Christian is not alone; he is not left to the mercy of his enemies, but God is with him, and who shall be against him to prevail over him?

Again, though a Christian be a worm, a person trampled upon, for so the church is the most afflicted part of mankind, yet 'fear not thou, worm Jacob,' Isa. xli. 14. The world accounts them as worms, and they account themselves so. They are trodden on as worms. They are worms upon earth, yet they have a glorious head in heaven, and a glorious guard about them. Strange things agree in a Christian. Therefore let us not stumble, though we see not these things presently. The life of a Christian is a mystery.

Again, hence we see that a Christian profession, to be a sound Christian, to have true faith in Christ, to be one with Christ, and to be taken out of the state of nature, this condition and the happiness of it, it hath the strongest foundation of any life in the world. Christianity is founded upon the strongest and the greatest reasons that can be. Faith stands with

* Qu. 'him'?—ED.

the greatest reason that a thing can do. Why? The comfort of a Christian is that he hath no enemy that shall prevail over him, and what is the ground of that? God is with him; God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Faith is that that lays hold upon that presence, and promise, and covenant of God. And is not faith well bottomed? A Christian that carries himself valiantly and courageously, is not his course grounded on sound reason? Is not God with him? God the Father is his Father, God the Son is his Redeemer, God the Holy Ghost is his Comforter. There is no other men that have strong reason for their course, for that choice that they make of their religion and of their ways. They prove but fools in the conclusion. Only the sound Christian that by the Spirit of God hath his eyes opened to see the cursed estate he is in by nature, and what it is to be in Christ, and by a Spirit of faith is made one with Christ, he is the truly wise man in his faith and affiance, that the world mocks at, that he hath no common supports in the world, which he cares not for if God be on his side. He cares not what man can do against him, as it is Ps. cxviii. 6. You see on what ground it is founded. God is with him, and none can be against him.

Let us labour to lay up these principles. We work according as our principles are. Principles are the foundation of all conclusions that arise from them. As our grounds are, so are we in our faith, and working, and grace, and comfort every way. If we have rotten principles, if the grounds of our comfort be rotten, our course will be rotten and uncomfortable in the conclusion. Let us build upon the rock, to be well bottomed and founded, that our principles and grounds be strong, and that they be so to us; for what if God be with his, if he be not so to us? Let us labour to lay up sound grounds. Grounds have influence into the whole course of our lives. This one text hath influence into all the parts of our lives, in doing, in suffering, in all conditions. I know not a more pregnant, fruitful principle in the Scripture than this, 'If God be with us, who can be against us?' It is like a pearl, little in quantity, few in words, but strong in sense, large in the fruit that issues from it. Therefore as we may carry pearls or precious things wheresoever we go, because there is a great deal of worth in them, and they be small in quantity, so we may carry this principle with us, let us be sure to lay it up and make use of it. There be these two, that there is a God, and that God is with his children, and so with his children that he will subvert and overthrow all their enemies, and all their plots and endeavours, a principle of wonderful comfort.

If this principle be well laid, it is a ground of a Christian's courage in all conditions whatsoever. It is no matter how many enemies he hath; for as Cyprian saith, *Non potest seculum, &c.*: the world cannot hurt him that in the world hath God for his protector. For the devil, he is crushed already. Though he keep ado, and stir up storms, he perisheth in the waves, as he saith. He hurts himself more than anybody else; he increaseth his own torment, and so do all his children. The flesh likewise it bustles against the Spirit, but it loseth; and the Spirit gains upon every foil. Why? Here is the principle, 'God is with us.' There is no power can resist God, for then God should withstand himself. The power that the creature hath, it is but a borrowed power; and if by a borrowed power it should withstand God's purpose, God must be against himself, his kingdom must be divided, which is a contradiction. Therefore this is the ground of the courage of a Christian in all conditions. What is the reason that the Scripture hath this phrase so often, 'Fear not, I am with thee,' as to Paul, and Joshua, and the rest? Because it is the ground of all

courage. We see weaker creatures than man: a dog in the sight of his master, he will fight courageously, because he hath a superior nature by him, that he thinks will back him. And shall not a Christian, when he hath laid up this principle, that God is with him, God incarnate, God in his nature, when he is a member of God as it were, of that person that is God, shall he not be courageous when he hath him to look upon him, and to back him?

And if God be with us, he is not so with us as to neglect us. He is so with us as he hath interest in the cause we have, and in our persons. He is with us as one with us, nay, as in us by his Spirit, and whosoever toucheth us toucheth the apple of his eye: 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?' Here is ground of courage in whatsoever may befall us, to stand it out in all conditions whatsoever. Nothing can sever Christ and a Christian; this body will never be beheaded; Christ will never be separated from his body; he will not lose the poorest member he hath. You see it is the duty of a Christian to be courageous and undaunted in the cause of God; and from this ground, because God is with him, and 'who can be against him?' Let all the world be against God, and against the cause that a Christian professeth, they do but kick against the pricks. They dash against a rock; as the waves that break themselves, they do not hurt the rock a whit. They do but cast stones upward, that fall upon their heads again. Therefore it is a desperate cause that malicious spirits manage, who have more parts than grace, and arm themselves and their wits to hurt the people and church of God, and slander his cause, and do all the hurt they can.

It is a ground likewise of encouragement in our callings. When God calls us to anything in our places that is good, he will be with us. Therefore in our places and standing, let us do that that belongs to us; let us not fear that we shall want that which is necessary, or miscarry any way. When Moses pretended he could not speak, 'Who gives a mouth?' saith God to him, Exod. iv. 11. Therefore let us take courage, not only in suffering and opposition, but in our places and standings. God will be with us; he gives his angels charge to keep us in our ways, Ps. xci. 11. We have a guard over us.

Here is a ground likewise of all contentment in any condition in the world. What can be sufficient to him that God cannot suffice? God, all-sufficient, is with thee; thou canst want nothing that is for thy good. Thou mayest want this and that, but it is for thy good that thou wantest it: 'Those that fear God shall want nothing that is good,' Ps. xxxiv. 11. It is a ground of all contentment, God is with them, to fill their souls to utmost. He is made for the soul, and the soul for him; for our end is to have communion with God in Jesus Christ here, and everlastingly in heaven. God is fitted for us, and we for him. Here is fresh comfort for the soul alway: he can fill up every corner of the soul, he is larger than our souls. Therefore let us be content; in what condition soever we are in, God is with us. Therefore 'let the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, guard our hearts,' Philip. iv. 7; even from this very ground and conclusion, 'God is with us, who can be against us?' Let Moses be cast into a basket of bulrushes, if God be with him, he shall not be drowned. Let Daniel be cast into the den, if God be with him, God will come between the lions' teeth and him. Let the three blessed men be cast into the fiery furnace, a fourth shall be with them, and keep them from the hurt of the flame. Let God be with Noah, he shall swim upon

the waters; and the greater the waters, the more safe he, and the nearer to heaven. Let God be with us, and we may be content with any condition whatsoever.

Again, let us not be over-much discouraged with our infirmities and corruptions: 'If God be with us, who can be against us?' Our corruptions are against us, and they are worse to me than the devil and all enemies, saith a poor Christian. Indeed they are, for the devil hath no advantage against us but by our corruptions; but if thou account thy corruptions thine enemies, they are God's enemies and Christ's enemies as well as thine. He will be with thee, and thy corruptions shall more and more be wasted; for the flesh shall fall before the Spirit. This Dagon shall fall before this blessed ark, 1 Sam. v. 3. Stronger is he that is in us than he that is in the world, 1 John iv. 4. The Spirit of God is stronger in us than corruption in us, or the world without us; it ministers stronger grounds of comfort than all other can do of discomfort. If you be under the Spirit and under grace, 'sin shall not have dominion over you,' Rom. vi. 14. It may be in you, but it shall not have dominion, because ye are under the covenant of grace. Therefore though corruption be in us, for our exercise and humiliation, yet it shall not be against us, to abridge us of comfort. They serve to drive us nearer to God. Let none be discouraged, 'Christ came to destroy the works of the devil,' 1 John iii. 8; therefore he came to destroy sin in us, which is the work of the devil. He came to take away not only the guilt, but the very being of sin, as he will at last; for if God and Christ be with us, who shall be against us?

Obj. But it may be objected by some, But I find not God with me.

Ans. It is true, sometimes God hides himself: 'Thou art a God that hidest thyself,' Is. xlv. 15. He seems as a stranger in his own church; to be 'as a wayfaring man,' as the prophet saith, Jer. xiv. 8. He takes no notice of his church and their afflictions; he seems not to take them to heart, nor to pity his church. Oh, but this is but for a time, and for trial: 'Can a mother forget her child?' Isa. xlix. 15. Put case she should, yet will not I forget thee. God hides himself but a while, to try the graces of his children, and to give way to the enemies; to let his children to see their corruptions, and his wise dispensation. And these desertions we must be acquainted with. God seems to be away from his children, yet he is with them, and supports them with invisible strength. He seems to be with wicked men in prospering them in the world, that they have all at their will in outward things, yet he is far from them. He withdraws himself in spiritual things; they have no grace, no sound inward comfort. And he seems opposite to his children; he leaves them outwardly in regard of assistance and friends, but they have an invisible inward presence of the Spirit to support and strengthen them; therefore measure not desertions, God's being or not being with us, by outward respects; for so he is with the enemies of the church oftentimes, and not with his children. But he is with his in the sweetest manner, supporting of them when they are in darkness, and see no light of God's countenance; yet they have so much light, though they think they see it not, as makes them trust in God: 'Let him that is in darkness, and sees no light, trust in the name of God,' Isa. l. 10. Therefore, as I said, it is a principle pregnant for comfort and use. If God be with us, he is with us in life and death; for whom he loves he loves everlastingly, from everlasting to everlasting.

Quest. If this be so, what shall we do to God again? What is the best evidence to know that God is with us?

Ans. There is a relation between God and his. He is so with them, as that they are with him likewise in all passages. Doth he choose them? They in time choose him: 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none in earth that I desire in comparison of thee,' Ps. lxxiii. 25. Doth he call them? they answer. Doth he justify and free them from their sins? they make that answer of faith that Peter speaks of, 'I do believe; Lord, help my unbelief,' Mark ix. 24. They have faith to lay hold upon the forgiveness. And likewise, if God be with them, they can delight in God's presence. Can God delight to be present with them that have not grace to delight in him? God's children maintain their communion with him in all the sanctified means they can; they are afraid to break with God. Therefore those that, to please and give content to others, and for base ends will displease their God, it is a heavy sign that God as yet hath not shewed himself in his gracious mercy in Christ Jesus to them.

If God be with us, we will be of his side; and his enemies shall be our enemies, and his friends our friends. He that claims this, that God is with him, he will say, I will be with God and for God. God hath two things in the world that we must have a care of, his church and his cause. Take them out of the world, the world is but a hell upon earth; a company of miscreants, profane, godless, impudent, poisonous creatures. Take away the cause of God, religion, and the people that are begotten by religion, and what is the rest of mankind? The world would not stand, but be all upon heaps, for a company of sinful wretches that will have their wills; but it is for the church and people of God that the world stands. Now he that hath God with him, and he is in terms with God, that they are friends, as Abraham was the friend of God, he will side with God and religion. God's cause shall be his cause, and God's people his people. He will cleave to God's side as the safest. If he may have never so much preferment in the world, he will not join with antichrist. He will not betray the cause of religion if he might have a world for it. Why? Because he knows if God be with him, who can be against him? God hath given us understanding and grace to maintain friendship with him, to have common friends and common enemies: therefore, if we stand not for God, let us never talk of God's presence with us. He will be present to confound us, to overthrow us, and pursue us to hell; but not graciously present without we labour to maintain the cause of religion as far as we may. 'God is with us, if we be with him,' 2 Chron. xv. 2. If we be with God to take his part, he will be with us to protect and defend us, to guide and comfort us, and to give issue to all our affairs. Not that our being with him is the prime cause of his being with us, but it is an evidence to know whether he be with us, as we make profession, when as far as our callings will suffer, we be with him and maintain his cause.

Again, If we would know whether we be with God, and he with us, ask conscience whether it be with thee; for conscience is God's vicar. Is conscience with thee? Dost thou not sin against conscience? What conscience saith, God saith; and what it forbids, God forbids, especially when it is enlightened by the word. Doth conscience speak peace to thee from the word? Then thou art with God, and God is with thee. Especially in the great point of justification, doth conscience speak peace to thee in the blood of Christ? Is thy heart sprinkled with it, that it is not as the blood of Abel, that cries for vengeance? Hast thou a spirit of faith, to

believe that Christ shed his blood for thee in particular? Then thou art with God, and he with thee, because God hath sprinkled the blood of Christ upon thy heart.

Quest. What course shall we take to keep God comfortably with us?

Ans. Look thou be in covenant with him, and not only at large in covenant; but look that continually upon all occasions thou renew thy covenant. For sometimes God's children may be in covenant, they may be his children; yet because they renew not their covenant, especially after some breaches, God is not with them so comfortably as he would, to free them from their enemies, as we see in the case of the Benjamites, Judges xx. 35. God's people sometimes may have the worst, though they be in covenant, because they have committed some sin, and have not renewed their peace and covenant with God. Therefore, if we would make a comfortable use of this truth, that God is with us, and would find him so in our affairs and business, let us renew our covenant upon all occasions, and our purpose to please God.

And then look to the cause we take in hand, and to our carriage in that cause. If our persons be good, be in covenant, and the cause good, and our conscience good, and our carriage suitable, then God will be with us. Let us make use of these principles, that we may be in love with the comfortable secure condition of a Christian. There is no state so glorious, so comfortable, so secure, and free from danger. If we were in heaven, and should look down below upon all snares and dangers, what would we care for them? Now if he be with us, and we with him, 'God is our habitation,' 'we dwell in the secret of the Almighty, he is our high tower, the way of wisdom is on high, to escape the snares below,' Ps. xci. 9. Therefore let us raise our souls as high as heaven and God is; and set ourselves where our hopes are, where our God is, and we have set ourselves in our tower; that we have set God in our hearts, and set ourselves in him; then we may overlook the devil, and men, and death, and danger, and all. As a man that stands upon the top of a rock, that is higher than all the waves, he overlooks them, and sees them break themselves upon the rock, so when we see God with us, and ourselves with him, by a Spirit of comfort we can overlook all with a holy defiance, as the apostle saith here, 'Who can be against us?' 'What can separate us?' Oh, the excellent state of a Christian when he is assured of his condition! Who would not labour for assurance that yields this abundant comfort in all conditions?

A word of the occasion* for which I made choice of this portion of Scripture. Here is a double fitness to the occasion, both at home and abroad, 'If God be with us, who can be against us!'

God was at home in '88.† He was with us in the powder treason: he was with us in the great sickness to preserve us,‡ and to give us our lives for a prey. He hath been with us; and we ought not to forget this, but upon occasion of this great deliverance, to call all former deliverances to mind, national and personal; to consider how often God hath given us our lives, and how oft he hath preserved us from death; and to take occasion to bless God for all at once, and so to make some special use of these meetings.

Then if we look abroad, God hath been with us in that he hath been his church,§ for they and we make but one body. That member that hath not a sympathy with the body, it is but a dead member. Therefore if we

* In margin here, 'Novemb. 5,' 'The Gunpowder Plot.'—G.

† That is, 1588, the Armada year.—G.

‡ That is, 'The Plague.'—G.

§ Qu. 'with his church'?—ED.

we be not affected with the presence of God with the armies abroad, we are dead members. We may say, in regard of these outward deliverances, 'God hath been with us, and none hath been against us.' If God had not been with us in the powder-plot, where had we been? Our lives would have been made a prey. That that would have been done, would have been more than the blowing up of the parliament. They would have blown up the kingdom with the king, and religion with religious persons, and the state with statesmen. It would have brought a confusion of all, and would have moulded all after an idolatrous antichristian fashion. It would have overthrown the state, and persons, and all. The issues would have been worse than the present thing. And, therefore, if God had not been with us, as he was graciously with us, what would have become of us? as it is in Ps. cxxiv. 1. If God had not been with us, they had made us a prey, and overwhelmed and devoured us all; there had been no hope.

Have not we cause to bless God and be thankful? Therefore let us labour to do it for ourselves and our neighbours. How shall we shew our thankfulness to God? Not in outward manifestations only, which is laudable, and a good demonstration of the affections of people. But alas! what is that? We must shew our thankfulness in loving that religion that God hath so witnessed for, and defended so miraculously. Labour to love the truth, to entertain it in the love of it, and to bring our hearts to a more perfect hatred of popery; for if we wax cold and indifferent, or oppose God's cause, and undermine it, do we think that God would suffer this long? Would he not spue us out of his mouth?—with reverence I speak it. Though he have defended us again and again, he will be gone with his truth and religion. It came not alone, nor it will not go alone. If religion go, our peace and prosperity, and the flourishing of our state, all will go. It is our ark. If that go away, our happiness goes away. Let us make much of religion. That is the way to be thankful.

Again, Let us shew our thankfulness by giving and doing some good to the poor, by refreshing their bowels, that they may have occasion to bless God.

And for the time to come let us trust in God; that God will be with us if we be with him, and to stick to him. Who then shall be against us? Let the devil, and Rome, and hell, be all against us, if God be with us. Bellarmine goes about to prove Luther a false prophet (*a*). Luther, as he was a courageous man, and had a great and mighty spirit of faith and prayer, so his expressions were suitable to his spirit. What saith he? The cause that I defend is Christ's and God's cause, and all the world shall not stand against it. It shall prevail. If there be a counsel in earth, there is a counsel in heaven that will disappoint all. God laughs in heaven at his enemies, and shall we weep? * And things are in a good way if we can go on and help the cause of God with our prayers and faith that God will go on; and with our cheerfulness and joy that God may delight to go on with his own cause. We may encourage ourselves, though perhaps we shall not see the issue of these things, yet posterity shall see it.

* Cf. Vol. I. page 126.—G.

NOTE.

(*a*) P. 397.—'Bellarmine goes about to prove Luther,' &c. Any of the numerous treatises of the great Jesuit will furnish examples of his 'railing' against the greater Reformer. See specially his *Disputationes*.—G.